

HOLY SHRINES OF ASSAM

**Brahmanical, Bauddha, Christian,
Islamic, Jain & Sikh**

Pradip Sarma



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Preface

Whenever a person from outside Assam comes to this region, he is fascinated by its natural backdrop. His next sphere of interest is automatically its people and their history and culture. The earliest inhabitants of this region were Kiratas, as our epics and Puranas reveal, followed by a thrust of Aryans from the West. During different periods of history the enchanting hills and valleys of this land attracted people from its different frontiers which set into motion a process of assimilation resulting in a state which became known as Assam.

After the Independence of India, the province of Assam was divided into several states, the one now known as Assam mostly covers the two river valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Barak. As these two valleys constituted the principle areas of habitation of this region from time immemorial, we find the majority of the historical evidences confined in these areas. By tradition, the inhabitants of Assam preferred to live in impermanent buildings and whatever resources they could accumulate were spent in the construction of religious edifices. This tendency is seen not only in the earliest history of the state, it had persisted throughout its past. It is because of this habit that we still find the entire state dotted with varied religious shrines.

All the sacred places of Assam may not contain a historical structure. Though Assam witnessed construction of beautiful temples since the beginning of the rule of imperial Guptas, none of them could stand the test of time. Most of the standing temples of Assam of the day (except those in Upper Assam) were reconstructed during the late-medieval period over the ruins of earlier temples. The same situation occurred in case of most of the Islamic and other edifices also. Even the churches which came into being by mid-nineteenth century toppled down due to weathering and under heavy earthquakes, and had to be reconstructed afterwards.

Most of the holy shrines of Assam are associated with interesting legends. Some of these legends are fictitious but many of them are based either on historical facts or on some local incidents. A good number of the Hindu places of worship are related to Indian mythology and even to epics and Puranas, which have not all together been overlooked in the compilation of this book.

This book has included mostly those places of worship in Assam which are great and auspicious in the eyes of their devotees and which are maintained regularly as religious sanctuaries. In describing the shrines, care has been taken to throw light on their accessibility, history, archaeological potentiality and the legends and hearsays associated with them so that the visitors can have a firsthand idea about the background of the shrines. Obviously, the type of rituals including detail of the objects of worship and veneration have been given primary importance.

This compilation is an attempt at giving the readers only a peripheral idea about the places of pilgrimage and worship in the state of Assam. The writer does not claim this book to be comprehensive and has included all the

shrines which deserve recognition and inclusion. It is true that his three and a half decades of service in the Directorate of Archaeology, Assam, was helpful in acquiring field experience upon which the book is primarily based. Nevertheless, one must admit that it is not possible to visit and acquaint himself with one and every place of religious importance in the state, the number of which is beyond any precise apprehension. It can simply be hoped that a more elaborate edition of this book with extensive illustrations to do uniform justice to all the religions can be brought out in the future.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge with thanks and gratitude the help and co-operation extended to this author by Sri G.N. Bhuyan, Former Director, Archaeology, Assam; Dr. P. Sharma, Geography Dept., Cotton College; Sri Prabal Das, M.A. and M/s. Bytes Com., Silpukhuri, Guwahati. Lastly, I recall with a sense of profound thankfulness the services rendered by the staff and officers of the Directorate of Archaeology, Assam, who helped me in more than one ways in undertaking the field works during the tenure of my service in the Directorate.

Pradip Sarma

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I

A Few Popular Religious Festivals of Assam

Though most of major Hindu festivals of Assam are basically Brahmanical in theme and spirit like all other states of India, some of them are celebrated here with a special fervour peculiar to this region. A few of such festivals are described below.

Ambuvashi

Also known as Amati or Saath in Assamese, this festival is observed during the months of June-July when the local fruit bearing trees attain their peak period of production. As per tradition, it is believed that the mother earth passes during this time through a period of menstruation covering four to five days when the earth becomes indisposed to allow performance of any religious rite on its surface. The temple doors are kept closed during this period and even the farmers suspend ploughing of the fields for cultivation. This time is considered by the pious Hindu widows as a

period of austerity when they take their shelter on a raised platform or a bed-stead and also stack their food above ground which consist of fruits, gram, Sagu etc., and even water.

When the period of impurity comes to an end 'as per the almanac, the priests of the temples arrange a ceremonial bath of the deities as also a ritualistic spraying of holy water around the temple compound, only after which the temple doors are thrown open for the devotees. This time of reopening is a special occasion for the devotees who throng the campus of the temple for a *Darshana* of the deity. Individual families also perform the same methods of purification of the household by using holy water.

The *Ambuvachi* is celebrated with special enthusiasm in the Kamakhya temple atop the Nilachal hill of Guwahati. During this period a large crowd assemble here from different states and even from Nepal. The areas around the temple take on a festive look where a fair also takes place; and the day of opening of the temple door is marked by an unusual rush of visitors.

Ashokastami

This festival is a ceremony of holy-bath in the Brahmaputra river. This river is considered by pious Hindus as equal in sanctity to the river Ganga. In the month of Chaitra and on the 8th day of waxing of the moon, the water flowing along the northern coast of this river is supposed to have come down as a special holy stream from the sacred Himalayas. A dip in this stream with the chanting of Mantras from the Puranas is believed to enable a person to free himself from sadness for one full year since the time of this bath.

A speciality to be noted with this ceremony is that it is not connected with any ritual except the holy bath at certain fixed areas along the north bank of the Brahmaputra, such as, Biswanath (Sonitpur district), Ganesghat (Tezpur town), Singri (Sonitpur district), Aswakrantra (North Guwahati) and Dhubri (Dhubri district). Though the ceremony should occur on the north bank as per Puranic tradition, certain sacred spots on the south bank also witness this communal bathing. It is to be noted in this context that almost all the places where this ceremony occurs is marked by fairs.

Durga Puja

Durga puja is celebrated in most of the states of our country. But, because of the prevalence of Sakti worship, Assam witnesses it on a large scale. Apart from the Devi temples of historical times, where this autumnal ceremony is observed elaborately, earthen images of the ten-armed *Devi*, together with her family members are installed in numerous pendals erected for this purpose in almost all the urban areas of the state.

Durga puja is celebrated for five consecutive days called *Sasthi*, *Saptami*, *Astami*, *Navami* and *Dasami*. During this period shops containing toys and balloons are set-up around the Puja Mandaps. At certain venues dramas and operas are also organised.

Durga puja is a *Sakti* worship. As such, sacrifice of birds and animals are indispensable during this time. Goats, ducks and pigeons are the normal creatures for sacrifice but buffaloes are also sacrificed at certain temples. In Guwahati, buffalo is sacrificed on the *Astami* day at Kamakhya and on the *Navami* day at Ugratara temple in the heart of the city. Among the vegetables, gourds are a

popular item of sacrifice. Buffalo sacrifice is also performed in some other temples.

The last day of the five day celebration of the *Durga puja* constitutes the concluding rituals at morning and immersion ceremony for the earthen images in the evening. The images are taken out in processions accompanied by music, slogan and merry makings, and immersed in a local river, a lake or a pond, as available. In Guwahati, some images are carried in large boats and even in motor-boats, along the up and down streams of the Brahmaputra, some of which are illuminated with decorative lights, till they are finally immersed into the river.

Dol-Utsava, or Fakuwa Phalgutsava

Known popularly as Holi in other parts of India, this festival of colours constitutes one of the major celebrations especially for the numerous Vaisnavite Satras or monasteries of Assam. An earthen mound of conical shape with a truncated top is raised and is preserved as a permanent annexe of a Satra, on the top of which is built an open shed using bamboo frame and thatched roof preceding the time of the festival. A Radha-Krishna image is installed under this shed and the festival is celebrated with rituals and performance of communal Samkirtana including throwing colours among the followers.

Among the big Satras of the state where Dol-Utsava is performed with conspicuous pomp and ceremony, Barpeta Satra has a name. Here, the festival is performed in a restraint but more devotional way and visitors from the different parts of the state assemble here during that period. The Satra authority as well as the residents of the Barpeta town accommodate the visitors as their guests even though they are not known to them.

The neo-Vaisnava Satras as well as the Visnu temples of Assam invariably contain an earthen mound within its compound, which may rise from a modest two meters to twelve meters. During the late-medieval Ahom rulers, some of these mounds were converted through royal patronage into a beautiful temple structure, known as the Fakuwa Dol. Consisting of a high plinth of octagonal shape resembling a stepped pyramid with an attractive temple structure over it, this structure appears some thing special in the backdrop of Indian temple architecture. Though most of these structures have already collapsed, one in the precinct of the Hayagriva-Madhava temple at Hajo and another at the Barpeta Satra have survived intact.

In certain areas, and more particularly in the district of Darrang, the Dol Utsava has taken a different form. This festival is celebrated in the month of Vaisakha (April-May) by installing the image of Radha-Krishna on the top of the mound, mentioned above, and the celebration is restricted to the normal rituals as well as the communal chanting of hymns accompanied by indigenous musical instruments. It is devoid of the use of colours as in the case of Phalgutsava. In the Mangaldoi Sub-division of this district, the different sanctuaries observe it by rotation on a fixed date of the month of Vaisakha, when fairs also occur in each of those sanctuaries.

Kangali Bihu or Tulsi Puja

Unlike the Hindu religious festivals which follow a lunar cycle, this ceremony is observed on the last day of the month of Aswin (September-October) every year. This, in fact, is the worship of the Tulsi plant which is considered by the Assamese Hindu Community as the incarnation of a Devi. The celebration consists of planting a Tulsi plant

in the yard of every family on that day and performing austere ritual in the form of offering fruits and soaked grams, and chanting of traditional hymns in adoration of the "Tulsi Devi". Though this ceremony seems to be very simple and is restricted to the confines of a family, it is connected with the raising of crops in the field. It is believed that the paddy shrubs unfurl the bunches of their young seeds on this day and the farmer community pays visit to the fields on this day to have a formal look at the first appearance of corns. They also enjoy bites of rice-cakes in a modest way to celebrate this day of promises.

The *Kangali Bihu* is considered as one of the three *Bihu* festivals of Assam. It is also known as the *Kati Bihu* as it is observed in the juncture of the months of Aswin and Kati (i.e. Kartika). The word Kangali means scarcity. As the corns in the field are yet to be ripe and people feel a sense of need for new crops, environment lacks the needed spirit for merrymaking. Obviously, this Bihu is observed without feast or festivity.

Magh Bihu or Fire-worship

This harvest festival is observed at the juncture of the months of Paush and Magh. It is one of the three Bihu festivals of Assam and is observed as a festival of feast and fire-worship.

A conical structure known as *Mezi* and made of bamboo and thatch or built with a heap of logs is erected by groups of people in their respective localities on the last day of the Paush and communal dinners are arranged among them on that night. At the dawn of that night or in the early hours of the following morning, this *Mezi* is lit with the chanting of Vaidic *Mantras*. Verities of cakes are offered to the burning *Mezi*. Then the people who assemble

around the *Mezi* take 'Tiloks at their foreheads from the ashes of the burnt up *Mezi*.

This unique fire worship takes a different form among certain communities who decorate the area around the *Mezi* with banana trees and flower garlands, and arrange *Samkirtana* next morning before it is lit with fire. The *Mezis* are generally erected on any open ground, such as, a sand-bar beside a river.

The days following the above fire festival are considered as days of feasting on snacks when every household prepares varieties of cakes using mostly powdered rice, sesame, molasses and other products received from the new harvests.

Maroi or Manasa Puja

Maroi is the local name of Manasa, the goddess of snakes. This worship is popular in lower Assam, particularly in the districts of Dhubri, Bangaigaon, Goalpara, Nalbari, Kamrup and Darrang. The day of worship of this *Devi* occurs on the 10th day of the Suklapaksa (waxing lunar fortnight) in the month of Ahar (May-June). She is worshipped both in aniconic form or by installing clay-image. The ceremony is arranged in some permanent *Sakti* temples, as also in temporary Mandapas annually.

Maroi is also known in certain area as Bisahari or Padma Devi. The worship is generally associated with the Beula-Lakhsminder episode which is so popular in the Assamese society. Chanting of Sukhnani hymn based on this episode is indispensable during this puja.

Though this Puja is not as popular and numerous as the Durga Puja, its celebrations in public Mandapas have started taking the form of a festival with fairs and operas.

In a few places, huge clay images of Manasa are installed in newly-built temples and are kept open to the public throughout the year which is renewed by a new image only next year. In the famous Sakti-pitha of Kamakhya at Guwahati, the Deodhai or Devaddhani Nritya is performed in the most aberrant way by a type of male dancers during this time.

In certain parts of the Darrang district the *Sukhnami* was sung by a group of Musalman villagers traditionally who were invited to perform it as professionals during such celebrations. They were trusted subjects of the erstwhile Darrangi Raja who was a vassal of the Ahom rulers. The tradition, however, has died down in recent years.

Saraswati Puja

Also known as *Sripanchami*, this *Puja* of goddess of learning is celebrated during January-February each year.

Saraswati Puja is the most popular annual worship of the state of Assam. It is celebrated in each educational institution including music and art schools and even by sports and cultural clubs. We do not find any permanent or historical temple of Saraswati and, installation of clay-images in impermanent pandals is the rule.

Nowadays, Saraswati Puja is taken as an occasion for exhibition of artisite skill in many of the venues. Apart from modelling the images of Saraswati in varied ways right from classical style to the modern poses, the backdrop of the installed images as well as the gates to the pandals receive novel treatments which help in the attraction of visitors. The second day of the Puja is celebrated as a day of merriment when the images of the Devi are taken out in a procession. But like the Durga Puja, it does not end in the immersion of the image in a river

or a pond, but kept in a corner of the pandal or the institution till next year when it is removed as an old unwanted object.

Viswakarma Puja

This ceremony has gained popularity since only a few decades and is directly related to the increase of industries and business establishments in the state. Viswakarma, as we all know, is the divine engineer and architect and his devotees consist of workers and artisans serving in workshops, factories and business houses. The Puja is performed on a fixed date each year which is the 31st day of Bhadra (i.e. 16th to 18th September). There is no permanent temple, old or new, for this god and it is always performed in a temporary pandal by installing clay images.

Being a ceremony of the workers proficient in different fields, the occasion has grown into a day of display of skilled gadgets and scientific devices in some of the pandals. In popularity, this Puja can be placed next to Saraswati worship. Like Saraswati and Durga Pujas, the day following the Puja is taken as a day for taking out the images on a procession, but it is not associated with any immersion ceremony like the Durga Puja.

2

Temples and Shrines of Brahmanical Worship

BARPETA DISTRICT

Garakhiya Gosain Thaan, Barnagar

Sarbhog lies on the National Highway No. 31 and is 145 km west of Guwahati. In historical times the greater Sarbhog area was known as Barnagar and it was capital of the Koch king Raghudev (A.D. 1581-1603).

The Garakhiya Gosain Thaan is an ancient and famous shrine of Barnagar area. It is associated with Krishna-Rukmini episode. It was originally established by a group of cowherds who for the first time could recognise the sanctity of the spot. The cowherds unearthed in that spot a polished stone object without any definite shape and established the same as the deity. It was believed, and is still believed, that one can get back his lost cow or calf when *Prasadas* (sacred comestibles) are offered to the deity. The shrine is supposed to be in existence for the last four

centuries and, with its modern extensive temple-complex, has grown into a popular place of pilgrimage.

The Rajadhip in the neighbourhood of Garakhiya Gosain Thaan is also associated with the Rukmini episode. Though this place does not contain any temple except for an old earthen mound, it witnesses a large rush of visitors during the month of *Jaistha* (May-June) when the God Garakhiya-Gosain (meaning God of the cowherds) visits this place. On this occasion *Naamprasanga* (chanting of choral hymns accompanied by the rhythmic beating of kettle-drum, cymbals etc.) and a *Mela* (fair) are organised in this place.

The Telaniya Gosain Thaan lies near the Garakhiya Gosain Thaan of Barnagar. It is believed that the shrine originated from a flame which had automatically appeared here during the historical times. The Thaan, with its spacious temple complex, has its separate establishment and is supposed to be a *Devi Tirtha*. It is linked with the annual festival of Garakhiya Gosain Thaan. The *Dol Utsava* or the festival of colours (Faguwa) is the greatest festival of this temple.

Parihareswar Devalaya, Dubi

The Dubi village lies about 5 km south of Pathsala, a growing mart-cum-cultural centre besides N.H. No. 31. A motorable road exists to this place.

The Parihareswar Devalaya is a Siva temple. Though the temple has a historical background with a limited number of stone components from an early-medieval temple, the lofty temple with its spacious *Naamghar* (prayer hall) in front of it is of recent origin. An well-organised temple committee maintains this temple and a reasonable number of devotees visit this temple every day.

As the temple enshrines a *Durga-Murti* also, the temple is taken as *Siva-Sakti Devalaya*, where sacrifice of animals are also allowed. Both *Sivaratri* and *Durgapuja* are celebrated here with pomp and ceremony.

The institution of the *Devadashis* or temple-dancers, which was inseparable from certain *Sakti* temples of Assam during the historical period, continued to survive in this *Devalaya* to the modern period and efforts are on to rejuvenate it with the help of the Government.

The village Dubi in which this temple exists is also known for the discovery of a copperplate of early 7th century A.D., which is the earliest copperplate discovered so far in the state of Assam.

The Assamese meaning of the word *dubi* is a water-logged depression. It is believed that the hill Durbalagiri, which at one time occupied this area, had sunk due to an earthquake and the name Dubi had evolved from the disappearance of this hill in this low lying area.

BONGAIGAON DISTRICT

Bagheswari Devalaya, Bongaigaon

The Bagheswari hill is situated in the east of Bongaigaon, a place which has by now grown into a busy town with the establishment of an Oil-refinery in its neighbourhood. Bongaigaon is 210 kilometres north-west of Guwahati and lies on the N.H. No. 31c. The Bagheswari Devalaya exists on the south-west foothill of the Bagheswari hill and does not contain anything old of archaeological importance.

This temple is a popular one among the people from the neighbourhood and is considered as a *Saktipitha* of great sanctity. It enshrines only a sword in a *Singhasana*

(lion-throne) which is supposed to be the *Devi Bagheswari* herself or the Goddess of the tiger. The priest of this Devalaya is a non-Brahmin who manages its daily worship. The *Ambuvasi*, *Durga Puja*, and *Jajnas* are performed here annually when the Brahmin priests are engaged. Sacrifice of animals is allowed here.

A number of legends are associated with the establishment of this temple. One of them pertains to the Puranic episode of fifty one *Pithas* of Sati, the consort of Siva. It is believed that when Siva carried the deadbody of Sati in frenzy, her sword fell in this spot.

The top of the Bagheswari hill contains a *Kali* shrine, Siddheswari by name. The premises of the Bagheswari temple witnesses big fairs during *Sivaratri*, *Kali Puja* and on the 10th day of the Rangali Bihu which occurs in the month of April.

A point worthy of note with this temple is that it shows assimilation of both Hindu and esoteric believes and the rituals are also managed here peacefully with the help of both Brahmin and non-Brahmin priests.

Bhumiswar Siva Temple

The Bhumiswar is a tall range of hill, about 8 km south-west of Bongaigaon, and the Bhumiswar Siva Mandir lies not very far off from the Bongaigaon-North Salmara link road.

This temple is situated at the foot of the Bhumiswar Pahar. The temple-complex consists of modern buildings, but existence of chiselled stone-blocks show that the site originally contained a stone temple.

The Bhumiswar Siva Mandir is locally known as the Rajathakur Thaan. It is believed that a local Raja or king who was a staunch worshipper of the god Siva, caused this

temple to be constructed. The temple attracts daily visitors, but the 6th *Vaisakha* (19-21 April) is celebrated here as the Rajathakur day when the area witnesses a village fair.

The region around the Bhumiswar Siva Mandir along with the hillocks and rivers is replete with interesting legends, mainly associated with Rajathakur.

Chaitanya Dhaam, Bongaigaon

This establishment exists at a distance of about 3 km south-west of Bongaigaon and lies beside the Bongaigaon-Baitamari road.

The Chaitanya Dhaam was established by Madhabdeva, a scion of the neo-Vaisnava preacher Chaitanya of Bengal, with the active patronage of the erstwhile princely state of Bijni. The *Simhasana* of the temple here enshrines Mahaprabhu Kalachand and the establishment is managed by a pontiff. The Dhaam has also preserved most sanctimoniously the wooden-slippers, a walking-stick and a flag, as the relics of the founder, Madhabdeva. When the present pontiff goes out on tours particularly to the houses of his disciples, his consorts use to carry with him this flag as a tradition.

Daily worship is conducted in the Dhaam. Several sacred days including *Sripanchami* and *Dolijatra* (Festival of colours) are celebrated here, some of which are accompanied by fairs and fanfares.

The river Tuniya is flowing by this Dhaam and the people consider it to be as sacred as the Ganga. The banks of the river witness a huge crowd during the *Asokastami* for a holy dip.

The temple premises do not contain any archaeological object.

CACHAR DISTRICT

Bana-Durga Mandir

Damchara on the Silchar-Lumding railway is about 30 km north of Badarpur railway junction. The Bana-Durga shrine exists about 4 km south-east of Damchara railway station. The shrine can be reached by a path which passes through the Katlachera-Jatinga Valley Tea Estate.

The goddess Bana-Durga is considered by the local people as an aspect of Devi Durga and is supposed to be the guardian deity of hills and forests (Bana or Vana means a forest). The shrine here consists of a stone tablet of one metre square and 15 cm thickness. It is kept erect inside a shed. As per legend, it was held in high esteem by the Kachari kings who ruled this region during late-medieval period. Presently, because of its seclusion, it attracts only the wood-cutters and tea-garden labourers from its neighbouring areas.

Though a simple tablet without any carvings, this deity as a symbol of *Sakti* seemed to have inspired the people of a large area in the past. Replicas of this type of different sizes were enshrined in the foothill villages of Silchar and are still worshipped as the guardian deities of those villages.

Bhuban Tirtha

The Bhuban Pahar is a lofty range of hills on the south-eastern border of the Cachar District. The Bhuban Tirtha exists on the top of this hill. It is about 70 km away from Silchar, the headquarters of the Cachar district, and can be visited in the winter season only when a hilly footpath of roughly 10 km length is cleared temporarily across thick jungle in the hill-slopes linking it with the foothills.

The Bhuban Tirtha enshrines the images of *Bhubaneswar-Siva* and *Bhubaneswari-Devi*, which, in effect, are the stone images of medium proportions established below natural rocks with their protruded upper portions extending over the deities like cantilever sheds. The area also contains some other sculptures, most of which are broken.

It is believed that from time immemorial this place was traditionally regarded by the Nagas, the Mizos and some other neighbouring tribes as their tutelary shrine and it was the late-medieval Kachari dynasty with their capital at Khaspur, not very far off from Silchar, who, with their active patronage, developed it into a place of pilgrimage for the people living in the Barak Valley. *Sivaratri*, *Dolyatra* and the *Varuni Tithi* (*Krishna Chaturdasi* of the month of *Chaitra*) are celebrated here when the place witnesses a big rush of visitors.

Kachakhanti Pith, Kumigram

Kumigram is about 12 km north of Silchar. Here exists a *Sakti* temple, Kachakhanti by name. The *Kachakhanti-Devi* can be presumed as the *Kesaikhati Devi* of the Brahmaputra valley, who was known for her crave for the human flesh during the historical period. It is believed that the Dimasa Kacharis of Cachar, who were the worshippers of *Sakti*, established this temple. Apart from the daily visitors, the temple attracts a large number of devotees during the time of *Durga* and *Kali Pujas*. The place does not contain any remains of archaeological importance.

Kali Mandir, Khaspur

Khaspur near Udarband is 20 km north-east of Silchar. The road linking Silchar with this place is motorable. The



Plate 1: Khaspur Kali Mandir, Khaspur, Cachar

old capital of Khaspur of the Kachari king contains a Siva temple, a Lakshmi temple and a Kali temple, the last being the only living shrine (Plate 1). In all probability, the deity of this temple was worshipped in the historical times as *Ranachandi*. Situated near the modern weekly market, this temple attracts a good number of daily-visitors, as also a rush during *Durga* and *Kali Pujas*.

The outer decorative features of this small temple (the plinth measuring 5.5 m × 5.5 m) with a typical Bengal-type of humped roof over it proves it to be a beautiful structure when it was intact. It does not contain any *Mandapa* in front, neither any other subsidiary structure in its vicinity.

Malugram Siva Temple

The village Malugram is situated in the northern out-

skirts of Silchar town. It is a modern temple, roughly one hundred year old, and was established by a *Sadhu* from North India.

The Malugram temple is built in bricks. A *Sivalinga* is enshrined within this temple. The *Sivaratri* is its major annual festival when a large number of devotees throng this temple. Though a Siva temple, it is also visited by the devotees in countless numbers during the period of Durga Puja.

Narayan Dahar

This temple exists on a hilly island in the midst of the Barak river and is 8 km upstream of Phulertal.

The Narayan Dahar consists of a C.I. sheet shed under which an image of Visnu is enshrined. It is an old image and was said to have been installed there by a Manipuri king during the historical period.

Narayan Dahar is known widely for its rare natural beauty. Here the devotees derive extra pleasure by visiting the island using country boats, as also by scaling the hill which, though not very high, is steep in elevation. The incidence of visitors to this shrine considerably increases during the winter season.

Narsing Akhara

This temple is located in the heart of the Silchar town. It was established by a *Sadhu* Bhagavan Das by name. Established in AD 1846, this is the oldest monument of the town of Silchar.

The Narasing Akhara contains two pairs of Radha-Govind images, both in timber. According to a hearsay, these images were thrown into a nearby pond by a Kachari king when Cachar was once invaded by Manipur. The

Sadhu salvaged them from the pond following this hearsay and enshrined them inside the Narsing temple. The two images still occupy the altar inside the temple.

It is popularly believed that a pleader of the British Court of Silchar, Govinda Deb by name, helped *Sadhu* Bhagvan Das by coins and kinds in the construction of this temple, one and a half centuries ago.

Salepur Siva Temple

Salepur is a small village about 2 km west of Narsingpur. The dead course of the river Rukmini lies beside this village. The village Salepur is inhabited by the *Goraksapanthi* Nath community.

The Southern end of Salepur contains a hill of about 20 m high. On its top exists a modern brick-built temple inside which is enshrined an old *Sivalinga*. The inhabitants of all the villages around this hill are devotees of this Siva temple.

The extensive area around the Mora Rukmini (i.e. the dead Rukmini) is replete with interesting legends. An area here is known as Baro-Muni indicating the abode of twelve monks of yore. It is believed by a section of people that they are none other than those preceptors who headed each of the twelve *Goraksanathi* sects. These twelve sects are known collectively as the *Baro-Pantha*.

Siva Temple, Sonai

Sonai is a busy market place about 16 km away from Silchar. It is linked by a well laid motorable road. The hillock Siva Tilla is two kilometres away from Sonai.

Isolated from the surrounding villages by extensive paddy-fields, the Siva-tilla is famous as one of the most



Plate 2: Sonai Siva Temple, Sonai, Cachar

popular sacred places of Cachar district. The truncated top of the hill which is roughly 60 m high, contains two old temple-structures known as the Siva Mandir (**Plate 2**) and Nandi Mandapa respectively. The Siva Mandir enshrines a *Sivalinga* while the small Nandi Mandapa does not contain anything now. The *Sivaratri* is performed here annually when a large number of devotees assemble here.

Two inscriptions on the body of the main temple inform us that the Siva temple was built by Jai Simba, the minister of the Kachari king Krishna Chandra (A.D. 1780-1813), in 1707 Saka or A.D. 1785. Both the temple structures here are typically alike and they, with their pyramidal roofing, are plain in construction.

The temple is under the management of a committee who has erected a few modern structures near this temple for the benefits of the visitors. The *Sivalinga* is under daily worship.

DARRANG DISTRICT

Bhairab Kunda

This place is 146 km north-east of Guwahati and the road to this place is motorable. Laying not very far off the Bhutan border and beside the Dhansiri river, this place is known for its natural beauty. Though the place does not contain anything from the past in the form of a temple or a shrine, the Hindus consider this spot as a place of pilgrimage and take their holy bath in the *Kunda* (Water-pool). Of late a modern temple enshrining a *Sivalinga* has been erected beside this Kunda.

The Bhairab Kunda is historically associated with the Trishuldevi Mandir at the Nalkhamora village nearby. Established by the great Koch king Naranarayan in the mid 16th century A.D., this holy place gained much importance during the time of the Kochas and was considered as one of the supreme *Saktipithas* of this age. Situated in the midst of a thickly populated area, this establishment is modern in its entirety and is a modest one.

The best time for visiting the Bhairab Kunda is November to January, when the road as well as this area remain free from flood-waters. As the river Dhansiri emerges here from a defile of the Bhutan hills, one can enjoy here the unique panorama of the rugged Himalayan foothills with high peaks and deep glens dominating the northern horizon. The sandy terrain around Bhairab Kunda retains signs of devastation caused by this turbulent river each summer.

Burhinagar Pukhuri

Burhinagar lies on the P.W.D. road linking Bardolguri on the National Highway No. 52 and Tangla town in its

north. The place has derived its name from the mother of Arimatta, a legendary king, who had her estate in this area. The Burhinagar Pukhuri is a large water pond said to have been excavated by king Arimatta for his old mother's use.

The Burhinagar tank is a sacred place and its water is supposed to be divine, which remains clear all the year round. Of all the water ponds of the Darrang district, Burhinagar Pukhari is the only one having such a quality of crystal clear water.

The *Deul Utsava* is observed on the western bank of this tank in the month of *Vaisakha* every year. This festival resembles the *Phalgutsava* or the festival of colours, but without the use of pigments.

Here, like all other places of this district where this festival is observed annually, there exists an earthen mound of the shape of an inverted cone on the top of which the image of Govinda is installed temporarily during the period of the festival. During this time, the place witnesses a village fair as also rush of visitors. It is believed that Burhinagar was the birth place of king Arimatta.

Dewalkhanda Devalaya

This temple exists about 3 km east of Mazbat and Mazbat is about 140 km north-east of Guwahati. The road is motorable all through. The temple complex here contains modern masonry buildings enshrining Siva, Parvati and Laxmi. The dome of the main shrine is an elongated pyramid, the tower of which can be seen from afar. It attracts daily visitors from the neighbouring tea-gardens as also some devotees from distant places.

The Dewalkhanda temple is established over the ruins of an old stone temple of about 12th century A.D. The scattered stone components here with their elaborate

carvings show that it was a beautiful structure. In fact, the deities now enshrined inside the temple constitute a few structural members of the erstwhile temple having images and carvings on them, which are taken as the three deities mentioned above.

Madhab-Gosain Mandir

Routa on the National Highway No. 52 is about 120 km north-east of Guwahati. The Madhab-Gosain Mandir is about 3 km south of Routa and this length of the road is a gravelled one.

Though an old temple, its dilapidated structure was dismantled and a new brick-structure was built over the old plinth a few decades back. The *garbhagriha* of the temple has already been completely engulfed by the roots of a Banyan tree. It enshrines a *Sivalinga*. It is in daily worship. The priest of this temple is a non-Brahmin and belongs to the Chutia community.

The area around this temple is vacant and contains a perennial rivulet. During the time of *Sivaratri* the temple witnesses a huge crowd when a village fair is also held here.

Math-Mandir

Known also as the Kamakhya Thaan, this shrine lies on the eastern bank of the large Lakhimpur tank, about 7 km away from Burhinagar road-junction. This is a Devi temple with a modern *Namghar*, the deity being a beautiful stone slab inset with a *Visvapadma* of exquisite workmanship, which is worshipped as Kamakhya. A *Kalasa* (a component from the crown of a stone temple) is placed beside the above stone-slab which is also revered as a deity. The temple has a good number of devotees, most of whom

are from the neighbouring villages. The *Durga Puja* and *Sivaratri* are its main festivals.

The entire precinct of the temple is littered with both old bricks and stone blocks. The carved stone pieces tend to show that the area contained a stone temple of medium height and the components reveal it to be of 12th century A.D. The Lakshmi Pukhari on the bank of which the temple is located is one of the largest man-made ponds of the Darrang district.

Muradewar Mandir

Muradewar is a small village, about 90 km north east of Guwahati and 6 km east of Kalaigaon. Both state transport and public buses are available to Kalaigaon.

The old historical temple at Muradewar has sunk deep into the ground due to its heavy subsidence for which the sanctum-sanctorum remains submerged under water. A *Sivalinga* is enstrined within this temple. At present a new temple with a spacious *Naamghar* has been erected besides this temple.

The Muradewar is one of the most popular temples of the districts. It is associated with Kamakhya temple of Guwahati. The legend has it that when Kundakalai, the priest of the Kamakhya temple on the Nilachal hill near Guwahati, secretly allowed the Koch king Naranarayana to have a look on the Devi who used to take her physical form and dance naked before the priest while he was performing the daily Puja, the *Devi*, with one slap of her hand, catapulted the priest's head to fall at Muradrwar, his birth place. The village Kalaigaon mentioned above has also derived its name from the priest Kundakalai.

Rudreswar Devalaya

Maharipara is a roadside village about 10 km north of Sipajhar and Sipajhar on the N.H. No. 52 is 56 km north-east of Guwahati. The Rudreswar Devalaya lies a kilometre away from Maharipara.

It is a Siva temple and the temple structure is a modern one with C.I. sheet roofing. The temple attracts daily visitors and cooked *prasada* is offered. Both *Sivaratri* and *Durgapuja* are celebrated here. The *Dolpuja* is also observed here annually.

Though the present establishment of the Rudreswar temple is a modest one, it has got a historical background. Records show that it was endowed with revenue-free land during the time of Svargadeva Gaurinath Singha (A.D. 1780-96). The fragments of old bricks that scatter around the temple points to the fact that the site of the temple contained a historical structure.

Tamreswar Devalaya

Tamreswar is a small village near Khairabari. To visit this village, one is to travel first from Guwahati along N.H. No. 31 upto Baihata-Chariali and hence along N.H. 52 upto Mangaldai covering a total distance of 68 km. Then, travelling north for about 60 km along P.W.D. road the site is reached. It is about 3 km south-west of the small town of Khairabari.

The Tamreswar is a Siva shrine. The stout *Sivalinga* here occupies the naos of an old stone temple, the super structure of which was long ago collapsed and scattered. The neighbouring villagers offer daily rituals to this deity and the *Sivaratri* is celebrated here in a big way when a fair is also held.

Some of the stone components now scattered around the temple contain figures and carvings of superb workmanship. Of particular mention is a stone lintel depicting the *Dadasaditya* (i.e. the twelve aspects of the Sun signifying twelve months) and a door-sill carved with a *Kalpavriksha* of exquisite beauty. The components in fact attest the existence here of an stone temple, fully ornamented, of circa 11th-12th century A.D.

DHEMAJI DISTRICT

Basudev Thaan

This temple exists at the village Marnai Bebejia, about 12 km away from Dhakuwakhana and is connected by a gravel road. The temple-complex contains several buildings with open spaces showing an old spacious establishment, but none of the buildings is ancient. The site of the temple is littered with old bricks, but the present new temple structure is a cathedral-like tall spire of pyramidal form. It enshrines a four-handed image of Visnu in stone, 108 cm high, which however does not contain any *ayudha* in its hands.

It is reported that the image is cut of spotted gray stone but smeared with black-paint to give it an uniform colour. The temple attracts a large number of daily devotees. It is managed by a family with its head acting as a pontiff. The person who holds his traditional control over the temple with its estates is a scion of the great Vaisnava saint Sankardeva. From the historical point of view, the temple has a long history. It is believed that the image has its Chutiya origin who ruled the territories in the Sadiya-Suvansiri region of Northeast Assam. Its present site is said to be chosen during the rule of the Ahom king Jayadhaj

Singha (A.D. 1648-63) who brought this image from the Sadiya region and established here.

Harhi Devalaya

The Harhi Devalaya is located on the Dhakuwakhana-Machkhowa road and is 5 km away from Dhakuwakhana, a mofussil town of the district. The Devalaya has a historical background, but the present establishment does not contain anything old except for the images. It is regarded as a Sakti temple. The *Durga Puja* is celebrated here in a big way when a large number of selective birds and animals are sacrificed. The *Sivaratri* is also celebrated here annually when a large number of devotees assemble here.

The Harhi temple contains a good number of images both of metal and stone. Among the metallic sculptures the Durga is the largest (61 cm high), which is depicted with ten hands in *Mahisamardini* posture. Among the other metallic images, a ten handed *Panchanana* (five faced) Siva riding its vehicle bull (50 cm high) is worth mentioning. The assortment also contains a two handed Ganga (42 cm high), with its vehicle Makara (crocodile) and four handed Visnu (35 cm high) with its vehicle Garuda (the mythical bird). The important stone images in this assortment are a *Dasabhuja* (20 cm), a *Panchanana* Siva (20 cm) and a Saraswati with two hands (29 cm). All the images here are dressed with stitched garments and are heavily vermilioned. They can be seen in their original form only on the *Astami* day of *Durga Puja* when they are washed ceremoniously and dressed with new garments.

DHUBRI DISTRICT

Alokjharir Thaan

Alokjhari lies about 12 km north of Matharjhar Railway station. It is a *Sakti* shrine. As per local tradition, this shrine is associated with the Siva-Sati legend of the Puranic fame but does not constitute one of the 51 *Saktipithas* built over the discarded limbs of Sati. It is popularly believed that when Mahadeva carried the deadbody of Sati on his shoulder in frenzy, her shoes were dropped here.

The 6th of the month of Vaisakha (i.e. mid April) is the day of its annual festival when a large number of devotees offer their Puja at this shrine. The place also witnesses a fair during this time.

Dudhnath Devalaya

This temple exists at a distance of about four kilometres from Bilasipara, the one time princely headquarters of the Bijni state. Situated at the foot of a hill of the same name, Dudhnath temple attained popularity as one of the most sanctimonious Saivaite shrines under the active patronage of the Bijni Raja. The temple complex of this place does not contain anything old except for the deity, which is a *Sivalinga*. The *Garbhagriha* including the *Mandapa* are constructed of brick and C.I. sheets. The *Sivaratri* and the *Asokastami* are celebrated here annually when it is visited by devotees in great numbers. The temple also witnesses a big fair during this period.

The approach road to this temple is gravelled which is not motorable during the rainy season. However it is not very far off from the National Highway.

Kamakhya Thaan

This temple is located at Mankachar, a small border town of Dhubri district, Mankachar, on the south bank of the Brahmaputra, is 270 km from Guwahati and can be reached by N.H. No. 37. It is also contiguous to the Indo-Bangladesh border.

Though mostly a river built area, Mankachar contains a small range of hill on the top of which are situated several religio-cultural monuments both of Hindus and Muslims. The Kamakhya Thaan is one of them.

Kamakhya is a very popular shrine of this region. The people believe it to be one of the 51 *Saktipithas* connected with the *Siva-Sati* episode. The place witnesses a large congregation of devotees during *Durga Puja* and *Ambuvasi* festivals.

Mahamaya Thaan

Bagarbari is a hitch-hike in between Bilasipara and Gauripur, and on the N.H. No. 31. The Mahamaya Thaan lies about 1 km north of this place.

This temple is established on an elevated spot of the low range of the hills which spread in east-west direction for several kilometres. The *Garbhagriha* of the temple enshrines an amorphous lithic deity supposed to have automatically been exposed out of the earth. Of late, the temple with its spacious Mandapa has been built in a massive way with the provision of auxiliary deities around it. Some other buildings have also come up for the benefit of the visitors who use to come to this temple in good number each day. The temple committee has also provided facilities for holding marriages in the precinct of the temple in the Vedic way. Being a *Sakti* temple, goats and selective

birds are sacrificed here whoever want to offer them. The daily worship includes *Dasopachara* (i.e. using 10 holy objects) in the day time and *Panchopachara* at dusk. The *Sodasopachara* (using 16 objects) is done during the *Durga Puja* and also on the 7th day of *Rangali Bihu* which occurs during mid-April each year.

The foothill of the temple has by now turned into a mart with many hotels and jewellery shops as also yards for parking vehicles.

Matherjhar Siva Temple

Matherjhar lies about 10 km north of Golokganj railway station. The road to this village is partly black-topped and partly gravelled.

Matherjhar is the only structural temple of Dhubri district that has survived from historical period. It is assigned to the time of the Koch king Naranarayan (A.D. 1540-84). It is simple in construction and square in plan, the domical part of which has long toppled down. The cella of the temple enshrines a *Sivalinga* and *Sivaratri* is its greatest festival when a village fair occurs here. The place also contains a moderately large water tank of the historical times.

Salkosa Kali Thaan

The Kali Thaan at Salkosa on the N.H. 31 is a *Sakti* temple and is a popular shrine of the district. It does not contain any temple structure from the historical period. The *Kali Puja* is held here annually with all fanfares. During this time a three-day fair is also organised.

DIBRUGARH DISTRICT

Mairamora or Ramdeo Thaan

Mairamora stands on the bank of the Burhi Dihing River, about 16 km away from Dibrugarh.

Situated ideally in a spacious yard, the temple here is a modern structure with C.I. sheet and bamboo-crete walling. The cella of this temple does not contain any image save for some carved stone pieces which are salvaged from the site itself. The villagers nearby assemble here during the neo-Vaisnava festivities.

The site contains the ruins from an early medieval period. Some big sculptures from the spot are now displayed in a site-gallery built by the Directorate of Archaeology Assam.

A brick-built *Buddhist Stupa* in the most lacerated condition can be seen in an arid area apparently affected by the flood waters of the Burhi Dihing annually not very far off from Mairamara-Thaan. The existence of this *Stupa* indicates that the area once was populated by followers of Buddhism, and in all probability, by a section of the Khamtis.

Mairamora is protected from the flood waters of the Burhidihing, which was ill-famed and still is for flood, by a high bund which runs for a long distance along the river bank.

Raidongia Dol

Raidongia is a remote village near Sesamukh and can be reached by a gravel road from Barbaruah on the N.H. No. 37. It is about 14 km from Barbaruah.

Raidongia contains a brick temple, the only extant

complete structure of the Dibrugarh district now in existence from the historical period. It was taken as a Siva temple since the forties of this century and a Sadhu maintained the daily rituals. But the discovery of a Visnu image about two decades back near the temple proved that it was a Visnu temple. The images in the niches on the outer wall of the temple mostly depicts incarnations of Visnu and, as such, the temple shows its Vaisnava origin. Both Siva and Visnu are worshipped here at present.

The temple contains an old tank and remnants of a rampart which once enclosed the entire temple-complex. It is said that this temple was owned by a relation of the Ahom royalty who deserted this area permanently during the Burmese invasion of the first quarters of the 19th century and settled in the north bank of the Brahmaputra river.

Sita Kunda

Jaipur lies on the eastern border of the Dibrugarh district and is located beside the river Burhidihing. The Sita Kunda is located in the upstream of the Burhidihing.

The Sita Kunda is a natural pond in the midst of a rocky outcrop. The rocks contain some holes in places which are supposed to be the cavities of the supporting posts of Sita's loom. The people come to this beautiful spot to have a holy dip in the *Kunda*. Negotiating the upstream by boat for three to four hours from here one can reach another place known as Kanai Borosihowa. It is believed that Kanai or Krishna used this place for angling, but the place does not contain anything religious except for a thread-like impression on a natural rock which is taken as the thread-mark of Krishna's angling instrument.

However, its association with the name of Krishna has made it sanctimonious to the pilgrims.

GOALPARA DISTRICT

Abhayadevi Thaan

Abhayapuri, the capital of the erstwhile Bijni State, is presently a Sub-divisional town. It is 5 km south of North Salmara on the N.H. No. 31.

The Abhayadevi temple is situated within the Rajbari area of the town. It enshrines a metallic image of the Devi and is in daily worship. The priest of this temple is the Kulapurohit (i.e. priest of the royal family) and the enshrined Devi is the tutelary deity of the royal family.

The *Durga Puja* and the *Basanti Puja* are performed here with all pomp and ceremony when a large number of devotees assemble here. Though the public is allowed to visit this temple, it is still maintained as a private establishment by the descendents of the royal family.

Dudhnath Devalaya

Jogighopa on the north bank of the Brahmaputra can be reached by road from North Salmara on N.H. No. 31. It is about 20 km away from North Salmara. The Dudhnath Devalaya lies beside the road which runs to the river bank.

The temple enshrines a large image of Uma-Mahesvara. It is in daily worship. The *Sivaratri* and *Asokastami* are celebrated here as its annual festivals when a large number of devotees visit the temple. Jogighopa is also known for a number of caverns hewn out in precipitous rocks in the

hill on the riverside. It is believed that they were used by some unknown recluses for meditations.

Ganesh Mandir

This temple is situated at the junction of the villages Lalmati and Duramari, about 5 km west of the Abhayapuri town. The road leading to this site is motorable.

The site contains three temples in a row, all of which are built recently. The temple at the middle of the row is the biggest.

It enshrine a stone image of Ganesha. The other two temples contain Siva and Visnu images, which are in fact building components from an early stone temple which are carved with smaller images. All of these images are salvaged from the site itself. The *Barada-chaturdashī* is celebrated here annually.

The Ganesh Mandir temple complex is built beside the ruins of an old stone temple of circa 10th-12th century A.D. The plinth of the old temple has been exposed intact behind the above row of temples and some of the carved components including the door sills, door-jambes, lintel etc. are preserved at the site.

Lungai Siva Temple

The Lungai is a small and isolated hill away from the Bamunipahar range of hills near Abhayapuri. It is situated 4 km north-east of Abhayapuri and is linked by a motorable road.

The Lungai is a lofty hill about 100 m in elevation, the top of which contains the scanty remains of stones and bricks. The present temple at the site is a masonry structure inside which is enshrined a *Sivalinga* which was

presumably survived from yore at the site. The site being away from human habitation, it attracts a limited number of visitors except on religious festivals.

The scenic beauty of the site with plains all around having a meandering river with its graceful curves skirting round the hill is simply unique which adds pleasure and a sense of holiness to the pilgrims.

Mahadeb Math

The Mahadeb hill lies about two kilometres south of North Salmara on the National Highway No. 31. The temple of Mahadeva lies at the foot of this hill. It can be reached by a fair-weather road.

The Mahadev Math is a cave temple. Located a few metres above the foothill, this natural cave is supposed to be an agelong abode of Mahadeva, the God of Death of the Hindu mythology. The cells of the cave contains a few pieces of stone containing friezes of gods and goddesses, the principle image among which is worshipped as Mahadeva. The sculptures do not seem to be original from the site and might have been the building components of a stone temple of circa 12th century A.D.

The *Sivaratri* is celebrated here annually. The 6th day of the month of *Vaisakhia* witnesses here a big festival when a village fair also occurs. All the *Pujas* here are performed by non-Brahmin priests from the Rajvamsi people.

Nandesvar Devalaya

This temple is located on a small and isolated hill beside the Dudhnai Goalpara road, via Matia. The river Dudhnai skirts gracefully round this hill. The temple-complex is a modern one but it occupies an old site.

The Nandeswar temple enshrines a *Sivalinga*, which is in daily worship. It is a popular shrine and is visited daily by the devotees from a far. *Sivaratri*, *Durga Puja* and *Dol Utsava* are celebrated here with pomp and ceremony which are accompanied by village-fairs. During the *Dol Utsava*, the temple premises witnesses the *Deodhai* dance which is known for the display of paranormal fits. The *Deodhai* also forecasts the future of the people as also about the weather-condition and the crop of the coming year.

The Nandeswar hill is replete with interesting legends. One of such legends is related to the discovery of the sanctity of the spot where the *Sivalinga* is enshrined at present. Another hearsay informs how Mahadeva caused the river Dudhnai to change its course to help the priest and the devotees to visit the shrine without crossing the river which became unfordable earlier due to its turbulence during the summer.

Narasimha-Bari, Goalpara Town

This temple is situated in the heart of the Goalpara town and is not very far off from the old Circuit House beside the Brahmaputra river. The temple is located at an elevated place on the foot of a hill.

It is a modern establishment which enshrines an old Visnu image in its Narasimha aspect. It is a popular temple of the town which is often visited by the Sadhus, who use to come on pilgrimages along the upstream and downstream of the Brahmaputra, as a transit camp.

It is in daily worship. During the Bihu and religious festivals associated with the Vaisnava religion, the devotees assemble here and perform traditional chanting of hymns, such as, *Naam-Prasanga*, *Kirtana* etc.

Paglababa Thaan, Paglatek

Paglatek is a secluded hilly terrain on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra. It is 15 km down-stream of the Goalpara town. The Paglababa Thaan is located just at the waterfront where the river has touched the hill.

It is a Siva-temple and the deity is known locally as the Paglababa. It is in daily worship by Brahmin priests and is managed by a temple committee. A small *Sivalinga* and some other carved stones are kept in the altar and are worshipped.

Though the temple complex is modern here, the site contains several stone components carved with motifs which may go back to 7th century A.D. It also contains a natural cave which might have been used by Sadhus in the past.

The location of Paglababa Thaan is most ideal. The link road has passed by the hill top which contains a spacious flat area for arranging fairs and opera etc. during the festivals. To visit the temple, which lies much below this yard, one is to go down to the waterfront by a steep stairway. The temple is so located in a gorge beside the Brahmaputra that it attracts the visitors for its rare scenic beauty.

Srisurya Devalaya, Suryapahar

The Suryapahar is a low range of hills about 22 km south-east of Goalpara town. It is about 130 km from Guwahati and lies beside the Dudhnai-Goalpara Road (via Matia). The road all through is black-topped except for a half kilometre approach-road, which is fair-weather at present.

The Srisurya temple is a modern temple with an open Naam-ghar (prayer hall) in front. It is situated beside an old man-made pond lined with bricks. The temple enshrines a stone block embossed with a figure at its centre

in sitting posture, who is encircled by 12 figures radially in a perfect circle. The central figure is identified as the saint Kashyapa and the twelve figures around him are his sons known as the Dvadasadityas of Hindu pantheon representing the twelve months of the year. The image is in daily worship but the incidence of daily visitor is limited, isolated as it is. (The nearest village to this site is Marnoi which is about two Kilometres north of it).

About 200 m south of the Srisurya Devalaya exist the Srisurya range of hills. Along the foot of this range lies a good number of rock-cut evidences belonging to Hindu, Bauddha and Jaina religions. Approaching the hills by the road, one comes across a number of modern C.I. sheet structures in front and atop a truncated hillock which constitute the modern *Bhogghar* (Sacred Kitchen), *Yatriggar* (visitor's rest-house), priest's establishment etc. To the right of this place, and in a hilly enclave exists a rockcut frieze containing standing figures of Siva and Visnu in alternate succession with a rockcut twelve-handed image on a protruding rock behind it, identified as a Bauddha image (*Avalokitesvara*). At the back of these images and in uphill position lies several rockcut *Sivalingas* and Buddhist *Stupas*. To its right, a few cubical caverns with rock-cut *Sivalingas* inside some of them can be seen. To the left of the buildings mentioned above, and along the foot hills, lie such objects as monolithic *Stupas*, caves with rock-cut Jaina images etc.

The *Sivaratri* is celebrated here when a village fair occurs at this site.

Tukreswari Devalaya, Krishnai

Tukreswari lies about 130 km west of Guwahati and is situated beside the Guwahati-Goalpara (via Agia) road. It is about 20 km south of Goalpara town.

The Tukresvari is a steep and isolated hill, about 50 m in elevation from its surroundings. At its foot-hill and beside the above road is located a temple complex consisting of modern buildings which enshrines the sleepers of the Debi. Above this site, and in an elevated place, exists a rocky outcrop with a natural cave enshrining a *Sivalinga*. The top of the hill is a rock formation, flat and spacious, which contains the *Devipitha*. This *Pitha* (amorphous rock-Formation considered as an image) is revered as one of the 51 *Saktipithas* of Puranic fame. The temple here is built using iron members and tinsheets. The hill being steep, the path to the temple is high and narrow, which, in certain places, are provided with iron ladders to scale precipitous rocks. The *Basanti Puja* and the *Durga Puja* are its major festivals when village fairs are also held at the foothill.

The Tukreswari temple is also known for its horde of monkeys. These monkeys are considered as traditional *Bhaktas* of the *Saktipitha* who have their daily share of *Prasada* from the temple. The monkeys have among them a pair with robust figures and are considered as the king and the queen. Obviously, this couple while enjoying their specific share of the *Prasada* offered by the priest controls the unruly nature of the other monkeys during distribution of the daily *Prasada*.

GOLAGHAT DISTRICT

Kakagosain Thaan, Bokakhat

This temple is located within the Bokakhat town and lies to the south of the National Highway which has passed through this town.

It is a *Sakti* temple and presently enshrines the *Ayudhas* (weapons) of the Devi. It is a popular shrine and is daily

visited by a large number of devotees. The buildings of this shrine are built in R.C.C. exhibiting big stature and proportion. The Durga and Basanti Pujas are celebrated here annually when a large crowd throng this shrine.

The name *Kakagosain* is derived, as per hearsay, from the fact that the Ahom King Gadadhar Singha (A.D. 1681-1696), while roamed as a fugitive prior to his accession to the throne, carried with him an image of Durga in a tube cut-out of the stout *Kaka* bamboo and spent some time at this place. When he became the king of Assam, he enshrined a Durga image of gold at this place. However, this image got lost during the Burmese invasion of early 19th century and the local people continued to rever the spot as the abode of the Devi.

Negheriting Siva Temple, Dergaon

Dergaon on the N.H. No. 37 is known for its Police Training College. It is 280 km from Guwahati and 28 km from Jorhat. Negheriting lies about 3 km north of Dergaon.

Ideally located atop a low hill and encircled by Tea gardens, this temple is one of the finest of all temples built in Assam during the late-medieval period (**Plate 3**). It is, in fact, a *Panchayatana* temple, the only extant historical temple of this kind in Assam, and enshrines five deities with their separate sanctum sanctorums, such as, Siva, Devi, Visnu, Surya and Ganesha. The main deity of this temple, however, is Siva who occupies the central cella. It is a popular temple of the state and is daily visited by devotees. The temple authority also provides facility in this temple for the regular performance of marriages, *Annaprprasanna*, *Upanayan* and other religious ceremonies of the Hindus.

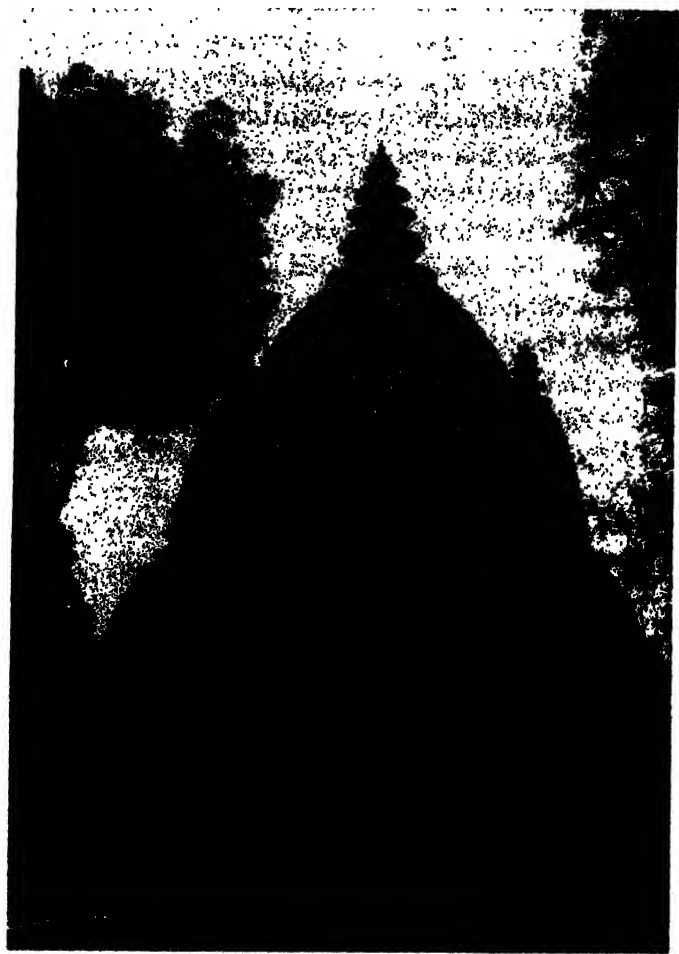


Plate 3: Nagheriting Siva Temple, Dergaon, Golaghat

The Negheriting temple was built during the rules of the Ahom king Rajeswar Singha (A.D. 1751-1768) in A.D. 1768. During the historical period, the temple was famous for the *Devadāshi Nritya* (performance of devotional music and dance by temple dancers and the name Negheriting is supposed to have been derived from the crownlike

hair-knot of these dancers which was locally known as the *Negheri-khopa*. During the historical times this temple was treated by the Ahom royalty with special status and the king had built a special road from here to the capital Rongpur, about 60 km away, to carry Nirmali (blessing in the form of flowers etc.) by riders each morning, only after the receipt of which the king was said to have taken his breakfast.

Numaligarh Babasthan

Numaligarh has come to the limelight in recent times due to the establishment of an Oil Refinery with this name, although the actual site of this refinery is several kilometres south of Numaligarh road junction on the N.H. No. 37. This small place on the Highway is 250 km from Guwahati and 58 km from Jorhat. The Babasthan is located on the Numaligarh-Dimapur highway and is 5 km south of Numaligarh.

The Babasthan enshrines a big *Sivalinga*, but the buildings here including the temple is done in C.I. sheet. It is a popular shrine among the tea-garden employees from the neighbouring gardens and it is also regularly visited by some devotees from Jorhat and Golaghat.

About a kilometre south of the Babasthan and on the Numaligarh-Dimapur National Highway exists Deoparvat, a steep hill of about 60 metres high, on the top of which exists ruins of a huge stone temple. The carvings on stone blocks here reveal that it was a beautiful temple of about 12th-13th century A.D. It is said that the *Sivalinga* including some carved stone blocks of the Babasthan were shifted there from the above ruins more than 100 years back by a Brahmin and established this new temple.

HAILAKANDI DISTRICT

Siddheswara Temple

This temple is located at a distance of about 20 km west of Silchar, the headquarters of the Cachar district. It is on the border of the two districts of Cachar and Hailakandi.

The Siddheswara is a Siva temple. It is believed by the local people that the site of the temple originally contained an *Ashrama* (monastery) of some hermit in the past. The area with its serene environment seems to have maintained that sanctity uptil now.

The *Varuni* (i.e. the 14th day of the new moon in the month of *Chaitra*) is celebrated here when the temple is thronged with a large crowd of visitors. A village fair also occurs during the period.

The credit of building a temple here is ascribed to the late medieval Kachari kings, the detail of which is lacking.

JORHAT DISTRICT

Burhigosani Devalaya, Jorhat Town

This temple is situated beside Garh Ali in the heart of the town. It is a *Sakti Devalaya*.

The temple enshrines a metallic image of *Mahisamardini Durga*. Though the image has a historical background, the buildings of the temple complex are modern. It is said that when the capital of Assam was shifted from Rangpur to Jorhat during the Burmese invasion of early nineteenth century, this image was also brought there. But due to the lack of peace and stability at that time, no temple could

be constructed. The image, however, carries clear signs of later medieval style.

The popular name of this image is *Burhigosani*. It is said that it was originally enshrined beside the *Burhi* river of the *Jayantiya* hills of *Meghalaya* state. When the *Ahom* army conquered this kingdom, it was brought to *Rangpur* and it got the name *Burhigosani*, indicating the goddess (*Gosani*) of the river *Burhi*.

The temple is visited daily by devotees from the town itself and also from neighbouring areas. The *Durga Puja* is celebrated here as its principle annual festival. The worshippers also visit it during other festive occasions of the *Hindus*.

Garakhiya Dol, Baligaon

This temple is located about 5 km north of the *Jorhat* town. It is a *Saiva-Sakti* temple.

The buildings of this temple-establishment are modern. Though the cella of the temple enshrines an image of *Siva*, the main deity here is a mole-hill, about 3 metres high, which is supposed to be caused by a miraculous act of the *Devi*. In spite of being a *Devi* shrine originally, *Siva* seems to be the main deity of this temple. The *Sivaratri* is celebrated here when a large number of visitors visit this temple.

The hearsay ascribes the time of establishment of this temple to the rule of king *Siva Singha* (A.D. 1714-1744) but the temple does not possess any historical document from this period.

Hatigarh Devalaya, Jorhat

This temple lies about 8 km east of *Jorhat* and is located beside the N.H. No. 37. It is a *Siva* temple.

The time of establishment of this temple goes back to the reign of Svargadeva Gaurinnath Simha (A.D. 1780-96). It is said that this temple was started as per the desire of the king. But its masonry structure remained incomplete due to the Moamaria mutiny. Presently, a big temple structure in brick and R.C.C. has been built. A large tank from the historical time has also survived beside this temple.

Sivaratri is celebrated here annually when a big crowd assembles here.

Pasupati Devalaya, Raraya

This temple exists near the Raraya aerodrome of Jorhat. It is connected by an all weather motorable road.

Though the very name of this temple indicates its Saivite influence, it is, in fact, both a Siva and a Sakti temple. It is said that the temple had originated from the Burhigosani Devalaya of Jorhat town. The temple enshrines a big stone image of Siva in its Vatuka-Bhairava aspect, as also a *Devi* image, assumed as Kamesvari.

The deities of the temple are in daily worship and are visited by a large number of devotees regularly. Apart from the annual festivals associated with Siva, the Sakti Pujas are celebrated here with much fanfares. Of particular mention are the *Durga Puja* and the *Kali Puja* when a large crowd throng this temple.

KAMRUP DISTRICT

Asvakranta Devalaya, North Guwahati

Asvakranta is a small hill on the north bank of the Guwahati city. It can be reached both by the ferries of the

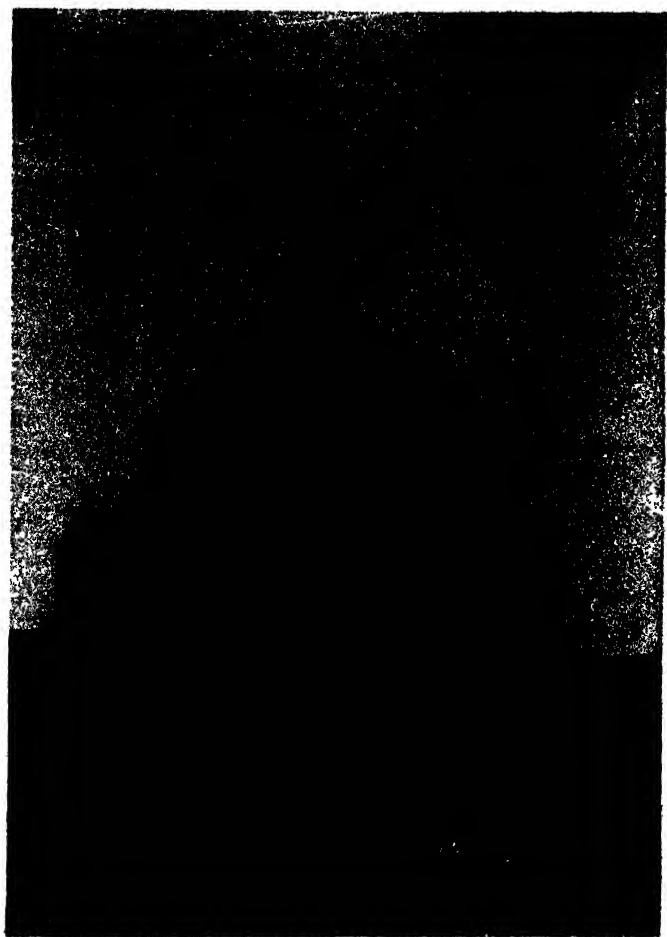


Plate 4: Asvakranta Temple, North Guwahati, Kamrup

Inland Water Transport Department, which are available frequently every day, or by road across the Saraighat Satu on the Brahmaputra, the latter being a lengthy journey covering a distance of about 25 km from the High Court.

Asvakranta contains two historical temples, both of which are Visnu shrines. One of the temples which lies in

a lower terrace overlooking a precipice contiguous to the Brahmaputra river is called Kurma Yanardan and the other on the top of the hill is the Anantasayi-Visnu (Plate 4). Two different aspects of Visnu, as the names of the temples signify, are enshrined here in the form of stone images.

The temples of Asvakranta are located ideally beside the Brahmaputra river. A long and massive stairway intervenes the two terraces of these temples,—a pathway which in stature is only next to the one at the Hayagriva-Madhava temple of Hajo.

The rocky waterfront on the east of the Anantasyi Visnu temple contains the *Visnupada* or the foot impression of Visnu where *Sraddhas* of ones parents and relations can be performed, for which the priests are readily available at the temple premises.

Asvakranta is replete with legends and myths. The very name of the place is associated with the Krishna-Rukmini episode of the Bhagavata. It is believed that while Krishna with Rukmini came from Kundin Nagar near Sadiya in Upper Assam after their Svayambara and crossed this place on his way to Dwarka, his cavalry (i.e. *Asva* or *Asvavalini*) was attacked i.e. *Akranta* by Naraka, the king of Kamarupa.

The credit of building of the two temples of Avakranta goes to the Ahom king Siva Singha (A.D. 1714-1744). But the sculptures and carved stones lying in and around the temple reveal that the site contained at least one stone temple of about 11th-12th century A.D.

Apart from a host of daily visitors, Asvakranta witnesses a huge crowd during *Deol Utsava*, *Asokastami* and *Janmastami*, some of which are also associated with processions and participations by the neighbouring villages.

The scenic beauty of Asvakranta is beautiful. One can have from here a nice view of the city of Guwahati

throbbing with lives and activities. One can enjoy the distant view of some other famous temples from here, such as Umananda, Sukresvar-Janardan etc.

Baghesvari Thaan, Mirza

Baghesvari is a secluded place deep inside the Forest Reserve on the east of the Mirza Pahar. To reach this site, one is to travel for about 25 km from Guwahati towards Mirza along N.H. 37 and then negotiate a fair-weather road on the left for about 2 km.

Baghesvari exists at the mouth of a glen along which a hilly brook with low falls and rapids have come down. A modern temple enshrining an aniconic symbol exists on a terrace beside the brook which is worshipped as Bagheswari, an aspect of Durga. The site also contains a rockcut Ganesha.

Scattered stones, some with well-chiselled designs and carving, prove that the site originally contained a small stone temple of about 12th century A.D. A few of the stone blocks are supposed by the people of the neighbouring villages as the remains of a mythical loom and the young girls offer *Pujas* to them for earning blessings to become expert weavers. Another tradition associated with this shrine is that the Kacharis living around that area offer *Puja* which is accompanied by the sacrifice of tortoises.

The site, though less accesive, was known for its scenic beauty. But unabated deforestation of recent times has deprived its natural grandeur.

Dhareswar Sivasthan

The Hatimura is an isolated range of hill on the north

bank of the Brahmaputra river. It is west of the Soalkuchi town and roughly 30 km away from Guwahati. The Dharieswar Devalaya exists at the foot of this lofty hill. The road to this place is motorable almost all the year round.

Dharieswar is a Siva temple. Though it received patronage of the Ahom King Siva Singha (A.D. 1714-1744), as the records reveal, the present buildings of the temple complex are modern and the site also does not contain much from the past save for scanty broken bricks and stone blocks with historical impress. An attraction of this spot is a small water-fall which exists at a gorge near the temple. The devotees of the temple consider it an act of piety to walk across the falling sheet of water.

Dirgeswari Devalaya, North Guwahati

Dirgeswari is the name of a branch of the long range of hills on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and is within view from Guwahati proper. The Dirgeswari temple exists on the eastern foothill of this range of hills. To reach this area one is to cross the Saraighat bridge on the Brahmaputra and travel eastward along the Amingaon-Mandakata road for about 12 km which runs often touching the north bank of the river. The approach to the temple is bifurcated from the above road at the northern end of the Rangmahal village which is a gravelled one, about a kilometre long, which passes along the foothill on its one side and the sand-bars of the Brahmaputra on the other side.

The Dirgeswari is a *Saktipitha* and the main deity here is a rock formation watered by an underground stream and is located inside a rocky sanctum-sanctorum, a wall of which also contains two rock-cut fingers. The *Durga Puja* is celebrated here when buffaloes are sacrificed.

The brick built Dirgeswari temple was built by Svargadeva Siva Singha (A.D. 1714-1744). But the archaeological evidences that have survived here point to its early medieval origin. The rock formations around the temple contains several rock-cut sculptures as also sacrificial altars.

The name Dirgeswari means the *Isvari* or the *Devi* of the *Dirgha* or lengthy hill. In fact the shrine exists at the tip of a long range of hill touching the Brahmaputra river.

Dolgovinda Devalaya

This Devalaya is located in that part of North Guwahati which is known as Rajaduwar. In addition to bus service, which take a round about away along the Saraighat bridge, the temple is linked with the south-bank by ferry services in regular intervals daily.

The Dolgovinda is a Vishnu temple. In recent times, it earned wide popularity and the daily visitors from the Guwahati city constitute a major portion of the devotees. A good number of the daily visitors to this temple offer milk, rice and sugar out of which the authority prepares milk-rice (Paramanna or Payasa) and offers it as the Prasada to all the visitors uniformly, save for a special share to the contributors for carrying the same home for their family members. The temple enshrines a metallic image of Vangshigopala. The temple complex contains only modern buildings but the precinct contains some old sculptures and carvings also which are, however, not original from the site but were collected from elsewhere and kept there as its prized antiquities.

Dudhkunwari, Rangamati

The Rangamati is a small hill, about 3 km south-west of Palashbari, a small town, about 20 kilometre downstream of Guwahati. The Dudhkunwari Thaan exists in the midst of this hill. It is motorable to the foot of the hill.

This shrine has developed round a rock with outgrowths resembling a pair of female breasts. It is believed that when Srikrishna cut off the different parts of the deadbody of Sati while Mahadeva carried her hither and thither out of frenzy, the breasts of the Devi were believed to have fallen on this spot. Thus, the origin of this shrine is believed by the local people as one of the 51 Pithas developed out of Sati's body as mentioned in the Puranic episode, although it is not recognised universally as one of them. Be that as it may, the shrine attracts a large number of visitors particularly from the neighbouring villages. The *Manasa Puja* is celebrated here each year when the shamanistic Deodhai (*Devadhhani*) dance is performed.

The scenic beauty of the Dudh-Kunwari Thaan is very impressive which makes ones visit charming. Of course, to achieve this pleasure, he must scale the steep hill for some time.

Gopesvar Devalaya

Deoduwar is a roadside village on the National Highway No. 31. It is 36 km north of Guwahati and 2 km south of Baihata-Chariali.

The Gopesvar temple lies beside the road. It is established in a natural cave existing in the low range of hill which runs parallel to the highway. The deity of this temple is a *Sivalinga* of moderate size. Of late, the

stone-quarry owners of the neighbourhood have undertaken extensive developmental works of the temple complex and have not only reclaimed the old pond near it but have also constructed a spacious prayer hall in its front.

Apart from daily visitors, the temple witnesses a large crowd during *Sivaratri*.

Guwahati Temples

Chatrakar

The Chatrakar is a low hill near the old steamer-Ghat of Guwahati. It is motorable to its foot. The truncated top of this hill contains three temples dedicated to Siva, Visnu and Devi, all of which are historical in their origin but renovated in recent times.

The **Siva temple** has a sunken cella which seems to be very old and enshrines a *Sivalinga*. The **Visnu temple** beside it contains a Radha-Krishna image. The temple on extreme right is known as **Mangalachandi temple** and contains a metallic Durga image in her Mahisamardini aspect. Chandi-Jajna and Vasanti Puja are arranged here annually. The temple committee has provided here facilities to perform *Annaprasanna*, *Upanayan*, marriages etc., by the public against booking of auspicious days on priority basis.

Ganeshguri Mandir

The Ganeshguri Mandir near the Dispur capital complex enshrines a large rock-cut image of Ganesha. Originally dominating the eastern precipitous end of the elongated Narakasur hill, this image has now been brought

under an R.C.C. temple with a thoroughly sculpted massive facade. It has by now grown into one of the most popular temples of the city.

Gita Mandir

The Gita Mandir on the Zoo-Narengi road is a new establishment. Situated on a hill and surrounded by a planted forest, this site is one of the most peaceful spots of the city. The temple is built with the Gita as its guiding spirit. The temple imitates a Ratha (Chariot) in its depiction and the body of the temple depicts scenes from the Gita. The Gita recital is arranged here from time to time and selective people assemble here in discourses in which renowned religious leaders and theosophists are often invited.

Hatisila

Hatisila is a rocky precipice of the Panikhaiti series of hills. It is by the side of the Guwahati Chandrapur road and is situated overlooking the Brahmaputra river. Hatisila derives its name from an overhanging lofty rock, a notch in the top of which holds an elongated rock-piece in pendant position resembling the head of an elephant (i.e. *Hati* or *Hathi*) with its hanging trunk.

The wall like rocks here contain a spacious natural cave as also over hanging formations which served as shelters for the mendicants and Sadhus who travelled along the Brahmaputra from time immemorial in their pilgrimages to Northeast India. The place still accommodates a few recluses and steadily permanent building occupy the natural shades shaping it gradually into a monastery of some sort. The cave, mentioned above, and the up hill

contains traces of geometric figures and letters hewn out on rock faces indicating earlier settlement in this area.

Langkesvar

Langkesvar is situated near the Guwahati University campus. The temple exists on the top of a hill and can be reached by negotiating a long flight of steps. The site does not contain anything made of human hands but the group of natural rocks standing atop this hill are held in high esteem by the devotees as objects of divine origin. A big boulder is worshipped as the lithic manifestation of Siva. It is believed by the neighbouring villagers that at one time Mahadeva helped the villagers at night by roaming in person to scare off thieves. But the burglars reduced him to a stone by pouring wine on his person. Two other stones near the main boulders are believed to be the hemp-grinding instruments of the god. The scenic beauty of the site is superb. Apart from daily visitors, the people in groups come here to perform *Naam-Prasanga* (devotional chorus) accompanied by cymbals and kettle-drums.

Latasil Ganesh Mandir

Latasil is a suburb of the Uzanbazar area of the city and is known well because of the existence here of a playground of the same name as also the Gauhati High Court. Latasil Ganesh Mandir with its conspicuous Banyan tree is situated on the northern side of this playground. The Ganesh temple here was established a few decades back when some sculptured and curved stones were discovered in its neighbourhood. It is a small temple but, because of its location in an important spot of the

city, has started growing popularity. It is in daily worship and is visited by the devotees from dawn to dusk.

Navagraha Temple

The Navagraha Temple is located on the top of a hill, Chitrachala by name. An well-pitched meandering motorable road connect this temple with the city-bus stoppage of Barowari within Uzanbazar area, about two kilometres downhill. The temple houses nine Sivalingas representing the nine planets of the Hindu astronomy.

The large *Linga* at the centre of the spacious cella is the Sun-god and the smaller *Lingas* around it are Mangala, Budha, Brihaspati, Sukra, Sani, Chandra, Rahu and Ketu. The general visitors to this temple offer their oblations to all of the deities but some devotees experiencing bad days offer rituals to a specific god as directed by their priests after analysing their horoscopes. The priests who conduct rituals in this temple belong to a particular type, known as Daivagya Brahmins (astrologer Brahmin) who are experts in preparing attractive horoscope. The old, dilapidated structure of the present temple has been reconstructed a few years back following its original features, but the well-pitched floor of the cella with the *Sivalingas* have survived from an earlier period and not latter than the medieval times.

Some scholars are of the opinion that the ancient name Pragjyotishpur of the city of Guwahati is associated with this temple which means the city of ancient astronomical study. According to Kalikapuranam of 9th century A.D., the name of this city was derived from the fact that Brahma, the Supreme Creator, created a star while he had his abode in this city. A visitor to the temple can also have a bird's-eye view of some parts of the city as also

scenes of the mighty Brahmaputra while travelling along the road.

Panchayatana Ganesh Mandir

The Panchayatana Ganesh Mandir near the new Guwahati Railway Marshalling Yard is a temple of recent origin. Done by South Indian architects in fully Dravidian style, this temple, in fact, constitute five separate deities with their individual cellas of worship, but the cellas are put under one extended flat roofing. There is also provision to go up to the flat roof and circumambulate the *Sikharas* (dome) of each of the temples which occupy the same common roof-slab. The four deities like Surya, Visnu, Siva and Devi occupy four corners of the temple floor while the centre is occupied by Ganesh. The daily worship here is conducted by South Indian priests who stay in the campus itself. The temple management has fixed the cost of rituals for the Pujas of each deity if somebody at all wish to offer the same in the full scriptural way. But for general visits, there is no fixed fee.

Pandunath Devalaya

Pandu is a dockyard on the south bank of the Brahmaputra which served as a railway terminus for transshipment of passengers and cargoes to the north bank prior to the construction of the Saraighat bridge a kilometre downstream.

The Pandunath Devalaya exits only 100 metres upstream of this dockyard. Being a city bus terminus, city-buses are easily available to Pandu from the eastern part of the city. Situated at the foot of the Nilachala hill and overlooking the Brahmaputra, this temple enshrines a rock symbol representing Vishnu. The outside of the temple contains

five rock-cut images of Ganesha in a series which are supposed to be lithic manifestations of the five Pandavas of the Mahabharata fame. A stone tablet inscription ascribes the construction of this temple to the Koch king Raghu Deva in the year 1585 A.D.

Shyam Mandir

The Shyam Mandir is situated at Bonda in the eastern outskirts of the Guwahati city. It lies beyond the Guwahati Oil Refinery complex and the visitors can have a glimpse of its lofty Sikhara from atop the Flyover on the Refinery-Satgaon road. The Shyam Mandir is a newly built temple by the authorities of the Indian Carbon Pvt. Ltd., but it remains open to the public for worship. It is a *Trikuta* Mandir having three separate shrines attached to one another, all depicting marble images of Radha-Krishna. Situated atop a hillock with a long flight of steps from its base, the precinct of the temple is meticulously designed to shape it into an ideal spot for recreation. Its grass-lawns and marble footpaths are well-laid and the landscaping is precise. The authority provides for all facilities to the visitors including parking for vehicles.

Sukreswar, Janardan and Banerwar Temple

The three temples known as Sukreswar, Janardan and Banerwar exist on the Mahatma Gandhi Road and contiguous to Panbazar area of the city. The first two temples, mentioned above, exist on the top of a hillock beside the Brahmaputra while the third one lies on the other side of the road and is surrounded by residential buildings. The Sukreswar temple was rebuilt over the ruins of an earlier temple in A.D. 1744 by Svargadeva Pramatta

Simha (A.D. 1744-1751) and contains a big *Sivalinga*, believed to be established by the great sage Sukracharya.

The Janardana temple is at a lower level of the hillock and is nearer to the entrance to the above site. The image enshrined inside this historical temple is the Janardana aspect of Vishnu. The credit of building this temple is also assigned to Svargadeva Pramatta Simha. The rocky precipice to the north of this temple and bordering the Brahmaputra contains five large rock-cut images, all of which carry signs of a high degree of weathering. The images depict Ganesha, Surya, Visnu, Durga and Siva and are dated to 11th-12th century A.D.

The Janardana temple provides facilities for the performance of wedding, *Annaprasanna*, *Churakarana*, *Upanayana* etc., for which a separate *Vivahamandapa* (wedding house) exists. Further, the *Sraddha* ceremonies are also allowed to be performed beside the river for which adequate arrangements have been made in the water-front.

The Baneswar temple is the smallest of the three temples. It contains a *Sivalinga* known as *Vanalinga* and the temple was built by Svargadeva Chandrakanta Simha in A.D. 1820.

Ugratara Temple

The Ugratara temple is located near the Latasil play ground of Uzanbazar. It is a *Sakti* temple and is believed to be sanctified by the discarded navel of Sati, whose polysected body gave rise to 51 *pithas* as mentioned in the Puranic story of *Daksajajna*. As in the case of the Kamakhya temple of the Nilachal hill, which is also a Saktipitha, the dark and dank cella of the temple contains an aniconic symbol of a navel. The temple witnesses a good number of daily visitors which increase during

important religious festivals. The Durga Puja is the greatest festival of this temple and on the Navami Tithi of this festival a buffalo is sacrificed. Of late, a Siva temple is also built beside this temple. The back of this temple complex contains a pair of ponds from which this locality is called Jorpukhuri (*Jor* in Assamese mean a pair and *Pukhuri*, a pond). The excavation of the ponds and the old temple are assigned to the Ahom king Svargadeva Siva Simha (A.D. 1714-1744).

Umananda Dol

The Umananda Dol is located on an island in the midst of the Brahmaputra. This hilly island (**Plate 5**) is mentioned in the old scriptures as Bhasmachala, Bhasmakuta or Bhasmasaila and is associated with the old episode of Kamadeva, the god of love, who was reduced to ashes by Mahadeva, when Kamadeva disturbed him in his meditation. In fact, the name Kamarupa of ancient Assam is supposed to have been derived from the fact that Kamadeva regained his life in this land. Umananda enshrines a *Sivalinga* in its sunken cella. The temple which is now standing over it was rebuilt during the reign of the Ahom king Gadadhar Simha in A.D. 1694. During *Sivaratri*, the island as also the south bank of the Brahmaputra opposite to it witness fairs when thousands of devotees visit this. The island also contains two other Siva temples of smaller heights known as Chandrasekhar and Haragauri. Both of them contain *Sivalingas*. Country-boats and ferries are available all the year round to visit this island from the river-dock known as the Kachari Ghat which exists near D.C.'s court, except during the months when the river is in spat. Apart from the pilgrimage, the

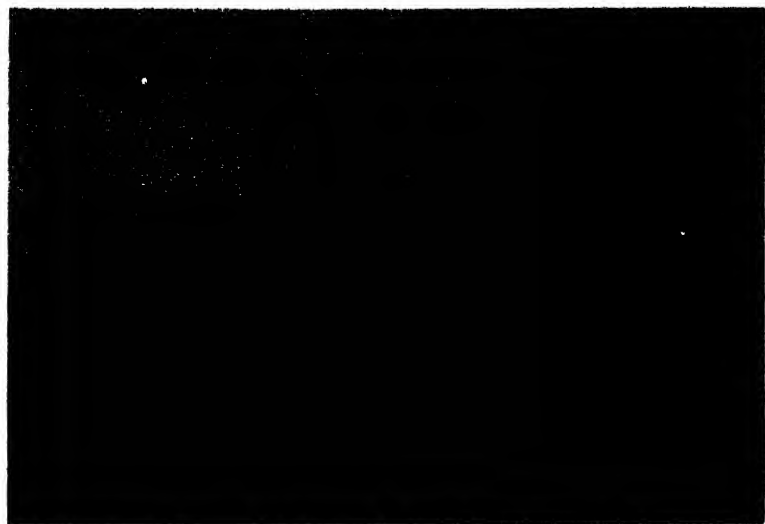


Plate 5: Umananda Island, Guwahati, Kamrup

very trip to this island and its neighbourhood is a pleasing experience to the visitors.

A tradition followed in this temple may interest the visitors, which seems to be very old. On the midnight of the *Sivaratri*, a castrated he-goat is sacrificed in this temple by the method of strangulation.

Vasisthasrama

Vasisthasrama exists in the southern periphery of the city of Guwahati. Surrounded by lofty hills, the place is known for its serene scenic beauty. The hilly brook known as the Vasistha-Ganga with its perennial flow and rapids crosses this place, on the bank of which exists the historical Vasistha Mandir. Built during Svargadeva Rajeswar Singha's time (A.D. 1751-1768), the cella of the temple contains a well-like cave, about 3 metres deep, at the

bottom of which exists a *Svayambhu sivalinga*, as also foot impressions of the sage Vasistha and his wife Arundhuti. A new temple has also been built in recent times near the old temple. Vasistha is a bus terminus of the city for the city buses which originate from the bus-stand at Judge's Field, about 8 km away.

Hajo Temples

Hajo is a mofussil town on the north bank of the Brahmaputra river. It is 30 km by road from Guwahati and the road is motorable throughout the year.

Hajo as a place of pilgrimage attracts devotees both from Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic faiths. As per a Tibetan tradition, the *Parinivana* of the Buddha had occurred in this place and some relics here are believed to be associated with the Buddhist religion. Even the Hayagriva-Madhava temple, which is one of the greatest Vaisnava temples of Assam, is supposed by the Bhutanese pilgrims to be a Bauddha temple. The Islamic shrine of Poamacca on the Garurachala hill of Hajo is considered by the Assamese Muslims as their greatest sacred place of pilgrimage in Assam.

Hajo is criss-crossed with a number of hills. Though the inhabited areas of this town are in the plains, the temples here occupy hill tops.

Hayagriva-Madhava Temple

Located on the top of an isolated hill of about 40 metres high, this temple (Plate 6) is connected with the foot of the hill by a massive stairway which by itself is a show-piece for the visitors. As per historical records the temple was reconstructed in A.D. 1583 by the Koch King

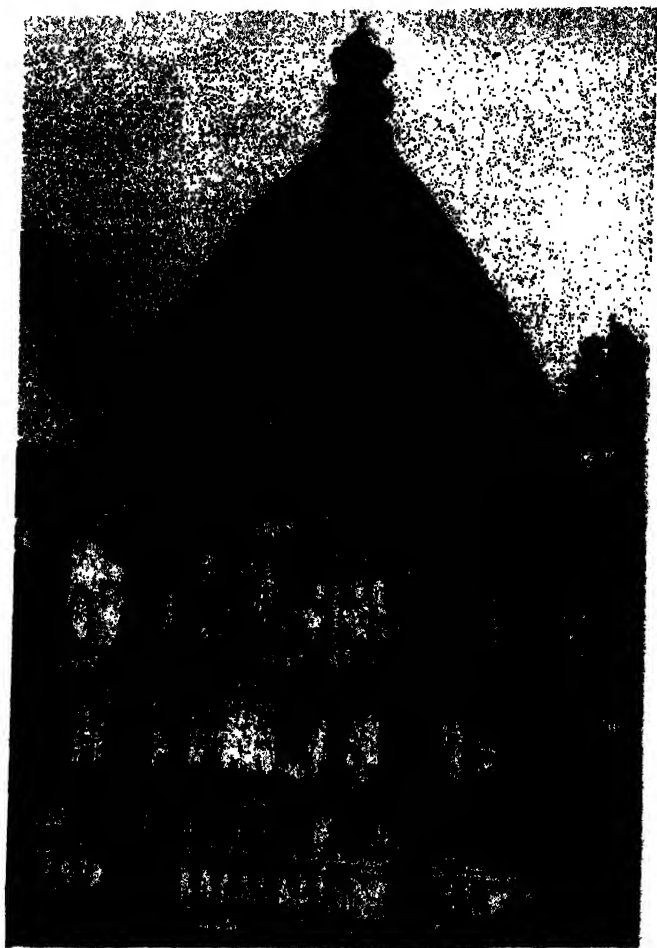


Plate 6: Hayagriva-Madhava Temple, Hajo, Kamrup

Reghudeva (A.D. 1581-1603) but the lower portion of the temple-structure as well as the sculptures on the body of the renovated upper half show their earlier origin which may go back to 9th-10th century A.D. Of particular mention here is the elephant frieze (*gajathara*) and a few geometrical designs on the plinth and wall of the temple

which resemble similar motifs of the famous Kailasa temple of Ellora. The *mandapa* and the *mukhamandupa* of the temple show the late-medieval Islamic influence of Bengal, both in structural method as well, as in architectural outlook.

The Hayagriva-Madhava temple contains a large, but mutilated, stone image of Visnu in the *Hayagriva* (horse-neck) form. As per a legend in the Kalikapurana, Visnu made his abode on the Manikuta Parvat after killing five demons including the horse faced Hayasura. Incidentally, the hill over which the temple is standing at present is known as the Manikuta.

The spacious precinct of the Hayagriva Madhava temple contains another temple, **Phukuwa Dol** by name (Plate 7). This eight sided structure with a domical top is standing on a stepped plinth of massive proportion



Plate 7: Phukuwa Dol, Hajo, Kamrup

which has given the temple a unique shape against the general backdrop of Assam architecture. The temple is used only during the time of Holi, the festival of colours (*Phalgutsava*), when an image of Radha-Krishna is installed here.

The foot of the Manikuta hill contains a pond abundant with big fishes and tortoises. These aquatic species are protected as sacred objects and the visitors to the temple make fun by offering puffed rice and other eatables to attract them.

Ganesh Mandir

This temple exists in a populous area, about two hundred metres east of Hayagriva-Madhava temple. It lies beside the gravel road leading to the region containing the other temples of Hajo.

It can be easily surmised that the site of the temple originally contained a huge rock with the image of Ganesh cut on it which can be stylistically assigned to 10th-11th century A.D. The late-medieval Ahom rulers caused a brick temple to be constructed over this image covering in the process only a part of the rock. The pilgrims use to offer their worship in this temple before going ahead with their pilgrimage to this area.

Kedar Kshetra

To the north of Ganesh Mandir exists the Madanachala hill. It is about 1 km away from Hayagriva-Madhava temple and is linked by a motorable road. The top of this hill contains a temple complex known as Kedar Kshetra.

One of the temples here is the Kedar temple. It is a stone-built temple where is enshrined a *Sivalinga*. Though a stone

tablet inscription credits the Ahom King Rajeswar Simha (A.D. 1751-1768) as its builder, the building components scattered at this area speak of its earlier origin.

The Kamaleswar temple is situated to the east of Kedar temple. It is a Siva temple. On the back of this temple exists a natural pond which is equally treated by the visitors as a sacred place of worship.

The Jaidurga temple exists to the south of Kamaleswar temple. It is a *Sakti* temple. Though a historical temple, it was renovated in recent time because of its ruinous condition.

The greater Hajo area contains several objects of religious interest. All of them are not equally popular due to their isolation, simpleness and natural disposition.

Kamakhya of Nilachal (Plate 8)

The Nilachal hill within Guwahati is popularly known as the Kamakhya hill. The Kamakhya group of temples are located on the top of this hill. A five-kilometre black-topped road links this temple town with the southern foothills along which passes the citybus route connecting the High Court and Maligaon. Both taxis and city-buses are available from the motor-stand at the foot of the hill. City buses are also available from the bus terminus at the Judge Field near the High Court. The elevation of the highest point of the Nilachal hill is about 180 metres.

Kamakhya as a place of pilgrimage is famous for its group of temples enshrining different aspects of the *Devi*, the largest temple being the Kamakhya temple. This temple enshrines the symbol of the *Kamakhya Devi*. This shrine is considered as the supreme *Sakti Tirtha* of eastern India and constitutes one of the 51 *Pithas* of the Puranic heresy. Though the precinct of the temple contains sculptural ruins and building components covering a



Plate 8: Kamakhya Temple, Guwahati, Kamrup

period since 6th-7th century A.D., the present Kamakhya temple was reconstructed by the Koch King Naranarayan in A.D. 1565. Like all other Puranic *Pithas*, the sunken cella of this *Pitha* contains a stone formation incised with the motif of *Mahamudra* (i.e. the genital organ) of the *Devi*. In addition to the incidence of a reasonable number of daily devotees for the *Darshana*, a section of the visitors to this place perform the *Kumari Puja* (worship of a virgin girl as the *Devi*), which is taken as a supreme act of piety.

The neighbourhood of the Kamakhya temple also contains several temples some of which enshrine different aspects of the *Devi*. One of them is the **Bhuvanesvari** temple which is situated on the highest peak on the Nilachala hill. The site of the temple is also famous for its rare scenic beauty where from one can enjoy an aerial view of the city of Guwahati and its surrounding including the course of the mighty Brahmaputra. During the

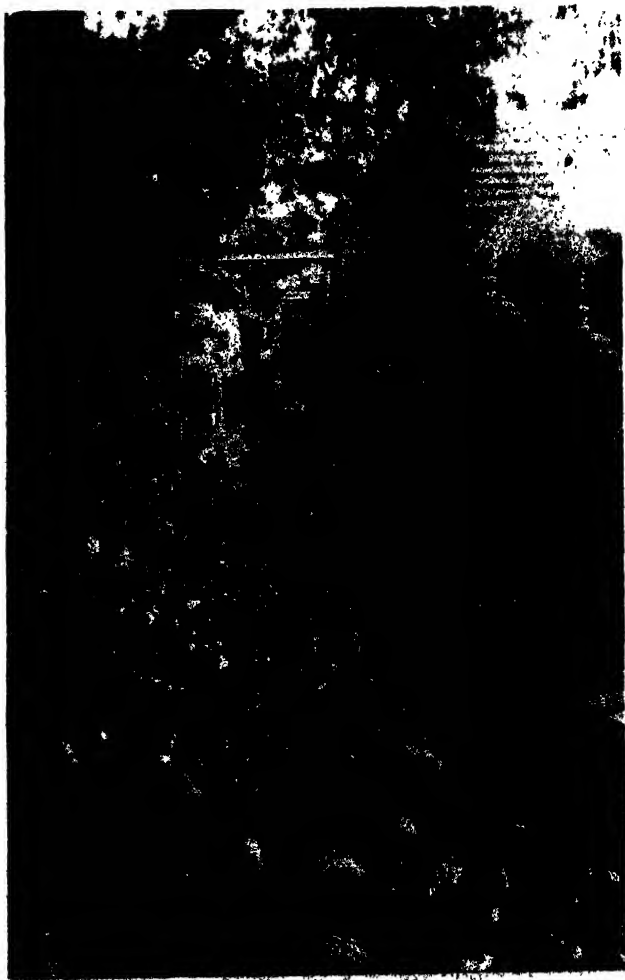


Plate 9: Deodhani Mela, Kamakhya, Guwahati, Kamrup

Ambuvasi which occurs during June-July, the temple attracts a huge crowd. The Deodhani Nritya demonstrating rare physical fits is performed as part of the rituals during the Manasa Puja which is celebrated during July-August (Plate 9).

Madan-Kamdev Devalaya

Madan-Kamadev is an archaeological site about 43 km north of Guwahati. To reach this site, one is to cross the Brahmaputra river by the Sariaghat bridge and reach Baihata Chariali, 38 km away. Thence, travelling south-east for about 5 km, one can reach the site of the temple.

Madan-Kadadev is a Siva temple. The narrow sanctum-sanctorum of the temple is the remains of an old stone temple of about 11th-12th century A.D. inside which is enshrined a life-size Uma-Mahesvara image in *Alingana* posture. It is under daily worship. The devotees may offer here *Naivedya* (offering of soaked-gram, soaked green-pulse, fruits etc.) and also rice, Dal (pulse), Sabji (vegetables), etc., out of which the priest prepares vegetarian food and serve the same among the devotees after offering a portion of it to the deity. In fact these sorts of offerings are rampant in almost all the major temples of Assam, the only difference being that non-vegetarian offerings are allowed in the Sakti temples only where selective birds and animals sacrifices constitute part of the offerings. The Madan-Chaturdashi is celebrated in this temple each year. The *Sivaratri* is also observed here. Of late the extensive ruins of temples around this site have been brought under archaeological preservation and the region, with its rare natural backdrop, has been steadily developed into a zone of tourist attraction, which has helped in the increase of visitors both to the site and the temple.

Manikarneswar Temple

Manikarnika is a small hill on the north bank of the Brahmaputra river. The ferry services to Rajaduwar in

North Guwahati from the Kacharighat near D.C.'s court has its landing almost at the foot of this hillock. One can also visit this temple by road from Guwahati after crossing the Brahmaputra by the Saraighat bridge and covering a distance of about 25 km. In fact, this road along the north bank also touches the temples of Asvakranta, Rudreswar, Dolgovinda, and also Dirgheswari by extension. In the deep and dank sunken sanctum-sanctorum of the Manikarneswar temple exists a *Sivalinga* which, along with its stone *Gahbor* indicates great antiquity. However, the twelve sided brick temple over this *Gahbara*, which exists only in parts, was recorded to have been rebuilt by Svargadeva Pramatta Sinha (A.D. 1757-1768). Situated on the peak of the hill overlooking the Brahmaputra, and linked with a bridle-path of lacerated condition, this temple attracts visitors mostly from the neighbouring village mainly during festive occasions.

Pingaleswar Devalaya

Bezera is a road junction and a mart beside N.H. No. 52. It is 5 kilometre east of Baihata-Chariali, mentioned above. Pingaleswar is 5 km north of Bezera and can be reached by a gravel road. It is a Siva temple, the deity being a *Sivalinga*. The site contains a new domical temple in bricks and a spacious *Naamghar* (prayer hall) in C.I. sheets. But the sunken sanctum-sanctorum in which the *Sivalinga* is enshrined have survived from an old stone temple at the site over which the present temple has been built. The beautiful sculptures and curved stones along with a stone pillar inscription salvaged from the old temple-site are now being exhibited in a site gallery built on the southern bank of the old pond in front of the temple. They belong to early 12th century A.D.

Though a Siva temple, Pingaleswara is worshipped as the Ardhanariswara aspect of Siva and, selective birds and he-goats sacrifices are performed here throughout the year. As for offerings to the deities, *Naivedyas* consisting of soaked gram, fruits etc. as also cooked food consisting of rice and only one curry prepared out of all comestibles offered by the devotees such as Dal, vegetables, meat, fish etc., are offered which are served as Prasada to the devotees. The temple seems to be a popular shrine during the late-medieval period and the temple authority preserves some old documents showing active royal patronage to this temple. The temple can be visited all the year round. Of late development-work as well as the work of beautification have been undertaken in and around the temple site by the temple authority.

Siddheswar Devalaya

Soalkuchi on the north bank of the Brahmaputra is known for its tradition of handloom-industry. It is about 15 km downstream of Guwahati but about 25 km by road from it. The Siddheswar temple is situated on the top of a small hill beside the Brahmaputra and on the western end of Soalkuchi. The road to Soalkuchi is moderately good and is motorable all the year round.

The main deity inside this temple is a *Sivalinga*, but the inside wall also contains a large Visnu image of circa 12th century A.D. The body of the temple contains a good number of stone sculptures of 11th-12th century A.D. and its door-entrance in front flanks two large images of *Mahishamardini Durga* and *Surya* respectively. *Sivaratri* as well as *Durga Puja* are its greatest festivals. The deities are under daily worship.

KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT

Bhagavan Pahar

This site exists at a secluded place about a kilometre north of Donkamokam, and Donkamokam is 20 km south of Hojai. It lies just beside the hilly road to the Sub-Divisional town of Hamren.

The Bhagavan Pahar is a hilly enclave in the midst of the rugged southern hills of Donkamokam. It contains a few natural caves with a number of corridors inside them. A brook flows down the foot of the caves. The site is serene and possesses a rare natural setting. A Sadhu has started staying permanently at the site and has named certain natural rocks after the names of certain gods and goddesses. Though a sanctuary in the process of its making, the area possesses the prerequisites of a place of piety and attracts a good number of daily visitors.

Burhagosain Thaan

This temple exists about 3 km away from Dokmoka, a road-junction on the National Highway linking Dabaka and Dimapur (via Phulani). It is located on the bank of the river Dikharu. It is a modern Siva temple built over the ruins of an old temple enshrining a *Sivalinga*. Though in ruins, this place was known to the pilgrims from a long time. When a barrage was built across the Dikharu nearby for the irrigation purpose about two decades back, incidence of visitors abruptly increased to the temple and some donors came forward to rebuilt it in bricks with a lofty dome over it. The temple also contains a spacious *Naamghar* (prayer hall) in front of it built of timber and C.I. sheet. Located ideally beside the perennial Dikkara

river, the temple attracts daily visitors from different parts of the district. It has an all weather-motorable road to the other end of the barrage. But a temporary road also exits directly to the temple across the foothill which needs improvement from time to time to make it worthy of constant use.

Deopani Durga Mandir

Deopani is located beside the Namaligarh-Dimapur road. It is about 45 km from Golaghat town and the road all through is black-topped.

The temple establishments of Deopani are entirely modern. But it houses a good number of stone sculptures found in and around the site, all of which can be assigned to 8th-9th century A.D. Deopani is famous as a *Sakti* temple. Its principal deity is a Durga image, 180 cm high. It is daily visited by a large number of visitors, both from its neighbouring tea-gardens, as also from the towns of Bokakhat, Golaghat and Jorhat etc. The rush of visitors become maximum during the days of the annual *Durga Puja*. The people use to believe this image of Durga to possess exceptional divine powers.

Mahamaya Thaan

Dokmoka is a road-junction on the National Highway linking Dobaka in the Nagaon districts and Dimaapur (via Phulani). It is about 25 km from Davaka. The Mahamaya is a small range of isolated hill about two kilometres away from Dokmoka and its elevation is about 150 metres. One can travel to the foot of this hill by cars and can reach the top on foot by negotiating a fair-weather hilly path.

The hill derives its name from a modern temple located

at its top on the ruins of bricks and stones from an early period. A natural pond with a perennial waterbody atop this hill enhances the beauty of this shrine.

The temple enshrines a mutilated deity believed to be Mahamaya, another name of Durga. Though the temple has lost much of its original grandeur and now managed by a non-Brahmin Bihari family, it attracts its followers from different parts of Assam who are mostly the Nepalese and Bengalis including a host of tea-gardens labourers. It is in daily worship. Located in an elevated place from where one can enjoy an aerial view of the hills and plains around it, this shrine was at one time under the control and management of the Kachari Kings who ruled from Dimapur. Maibang and Khaspur (now in Cachar district) during different times of the late-medieval period. Records show it to be the topmost *Sakti* shrine of the Kachari regime and its worship was accompanied by the sacrifice of liberal numbers of birds and beasts.

The top of the Mahamaya also contains sculptural ruins and a small cave hewn out of rock with some other objects of antiquarian importance.

Tilapara Image of Durga

Langhin is a roadside mart on the Dabaka-Dimapur National Highway. It is about 10 km east of Dokmoka Bazar. Tilapara is a sleepy village about 7 km north of Langhin. The Langhin-Tilapara road is almost black-topped except for its last leg of two kilometres which is gravelled. Tilapara has derived its name from a *Tila* or a small and isolated hillock, about 20 metre in elevation. The top of this hillock contains a few rocks, the most conspicuous among which contains a rock-cut image of ten-handed Durga of about one metre high. The image

is stylistically assigned to 10th century A.D. The Bodo villagers near this hill have put a C.I. sheet shed in front of this image and they arrange *Vedic Pujas* bringing Brahmin priests during festive occasions. The shrine is yet to be developed into a sanctuary of regular worship.

A rock-cut image of Ganesha of the same proportion can be seen on a rock at Boga Dal, about a kilometre east of Tilapara. The image is also worshipped occasionally by the nearby villagers.

KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT

Aisakhatir Thaan

This shrine exists about 3 km east of the Sapatgram railway station and Sapatgram is about 16 km west of Kokrajhar by road.

Aisakhati is a Devi temple. It is situated on a hillock and is believed to be another manifestation of goddess Kali. The 6th of the month of *Bahag* (i.e. 20th or 21st April) is celebrated here with pomp and ceremony when, in addition to religious events, a fair also occurs.

Aisakhati is associated with a number of legends. It is considered as one of the *Saktipithas* of the Siva-Sati episode and is believed to be sanctified with the bangles of Sati, the consort of Siva.

Pharogura Khorong

This hilly outcrop exists about 5 km away from Kokrajhar. The site does not contain anything other than a large host of pigeons in natural caves which are believed to be divine. No regular rituals are performed here but it is arranged when the villagers around the site feel the need

of it to avert the affect of bad days. Naturally, the deity of worship here is the host of pigeons which is considered as divine.

The word Pharogura is said to be a colloquial form of the Assamese word Paraghura which means the flights of pigeons.

LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT

Bothavati Dol

Tinikuria is a small village about 3 km south-east of the Lakhimpur town. The Bothavati Dol is situated just beside the P.W.D. road of this village.

It is a modern temple and enshrines a metallic image. Measuring 16 cm in height and with the glitter of gold, the local people consider the metallic image to be that of Durga. But the icon does not reveal any female feature. Records show that the temple received donation of land from the Ahom royalty and it may so happen that the original deity is lost or stolen on some earlier occasion.

Maghnowa Dol

The village Maghnowa lies about 5 km north of Dhalpur, a road side village in the western end of the district and beside the National Highway No. 52. The temple establishment here is situated just on bank of the Pichala river, a tributary of the Brahmaputra.

Maghnowa contains an old temple of the Ahom period. It is octagonal in shape with a two-roofed Mandapa in front and contains two rows of sculptures on the walls around the temple. The temple does not contain any deity inside at present, but sculptures on the body of the temple

tend to prove it to be a *Sakti* temple. The neo-Vaisnavite villages from the neighbourhood have erected a *Naamghar* near the temple and have enshrined a copy of the *Bhagavata* in an wooden *Simhasana* before which they assemble from time to time and offer their prayers.

The road to the temple from the National Highway is gravelled and can be used all the year round. It is about 330 km east of Guwahati and 50 km west of North-Lakhimpur, the headquarters of the Lakhimpur districts.

Neel Devalaya

This temple is about 3 km away from the North Lakhimpur town and on way to Gharmara where a neo-Vaisnava monastery of name and fame exists.

It is a *Sakti* temple. The modern sanctum-sanctorum of the temple-shed contains only the feet portions of a stone image with the monolithic pedestal on which it was depicted, which are worshipped as the legs of the *Devi*.

The *Devi* derives its name from the stone from which it was hewn out, which is blue in colour. The colour blue in Assamese is called "Neel".

The temple also enshrines a metallic Vishnu image 21 cm high, carrying typical weapons in its four hands. The image carries late-medieval features.

Panchanan Devalaya

This temple exists at the heart of the Lakhimpur town. Though the temple is made of bricks and C.I. sheets, the deity enshrined here is old.

The temple is known as *Panchanan* indicating a five-faced Siva. But it contains a stone image of a youthful goddess, 49 cm high, in sitting posture. The four-handed goddess

sits on a person lying on his back and wearing a crown. The *Devi* wears a garland of human heads. It is worshipped as Durga.

MORIGAON DISTRICT

Bardeo Thaan

Neli is a road side market on the Guwahati-Nagaon National Highway. It is about 70 km by road from Guwahati. The Bardeo Thaan lies on the Neli-Umpanai road and it is about a kilometre away from Neli.

The Bardeo Thaan is a tribal shrine and does not contain any object of worship save for a large flat-stone. It is believed that human-sacrifice was prevalent in this shrine and the feudal lord of the area, known as the *Barpaikar*, traditionally performed it once in a year. Though the descendants of this ruling family still exist, they do not visit this place of worship at present following some misgiving in the past. The Tiwa-Lalung people of the neighbourhood offer their yearly ritual in this shrine by sacrificing a goat and a pair of pigeons. It is also reported that a black-bull is released here each year in the name of god as the substitute of the traditional human-sacrifice.

Bhagavati Thaan

This shrine is situated on a hillock a quarter of a kilometre south of Neli Bazar on the National Highway No. 37. It is linked by a fair weather-road.

Beautifully located atop an isolated hillock, the temple structure of this shrine is built in bricks very recently. The cella of the temple contains a *Sivalinga*, but its four cardinal sides are provided with four *Devi* images, all in sitting

posture and in meditation. Though all the images are almost alike, the local tribals worship them separately as *Bhagavati*, *Mahamaya*, *Kesaikhati* (eater of raw-flesh) and *Kani-Kuji* (blind-and-humped—a tribal goddess). It is believed by the followers of this shrine that the *Devis* need to be pacified just before the *Rangali Bihu* which occurs on the first of *Bahag* (*Vaisakha*-mid April) and as such, ducks, pigeons, goats, tortoises and sugar canes are sacrificed in the fag end of the month of *Chaitra*.

Being very near to the busy Neli market and is accessible all the year round, the temple attracts daily visitors. On festive occasions, the place witnesses a large crowd of devotees.

Boha Ganesh Temple

Kamarpur lies on the Sonapur-Mayong road. From this place exists a 20 km long gravelled P.W.D. road towards east linking Bhakat Gaon near Jagiroad. The isolated Boha hill lies 12 km east of Kamarpur. It can also be visited from Bhakat Gaon via Jagiroad on the National Highway in which case the rough road covers only 8 km.

The Boha is a small hill. The river Kalang meets the rocky foothill of this hill at its southern side and takes an elbow turn towards west. The Ganesha image is cut on a slopped rock beside the river.

This image at Boha is the largest of the numerous images of Ganesha found in Assam. Depicted in a sitting posture following the natural convex slope of the rock and facing the south, this image rises to a height of 450 cm. Presently, the management committee of the image has erected a C.I. sheet shed with provisions of daily worship. As the flood affected region around the Boha hill is thinly populated, the daily visitors to the temple is not much.

But, the travellers who pass by the road that exists abreast of this shrine invariably pay a brief visit to the shrine.

Burha-Burhi Ganesh Mandir

The Burha-Burhi is another isolated hill in the vast flood-affected plains of Mayong. It exists to the north of the Boha hill mentioned above and can be approached from Mayong Bazar along the Mayong-Bhakatgaon road.

The southern foot of the Burha-Burhi hill contains a rock-cut image of Ganesha as also a temple near it. Measuring 80 cm in height, the image is not in worship because of its mutilation evidently by the vandals and the worship is carried out in another image in the same rock over which a temple with a *Mandapa* has been built.

Burha-Burhi is an old village the inhabitants of which performed several annual festivals assigned to Siva and Parvati. It contains two old ponds of larger proportions which speak of the antiquity of this place. A beautiful image of Visnu was discovered from one of the ponds a few years back which was shifted to the Assam State Museum. The old inhabitants of this area migrated a few decades back due to a number of epidemics and the present population are immigrants mostly from Bangladesh.

Kachosila Sivashram

The Kachosila is a small range of hill about a kilometre north of Mayong Bazar. It is well-linked by a gravelled road.

The peak of the Kachosila, which is about 40 metres in elevation, contains two rock-cut twin images of Uma-Mahesvara round which a modest temple complex has been established. A *Sadhu* dwells in this temple permanently who maintains the daily rituals. A spacious

terrace just below the rocky peak of the hill recently revealed an walled area with pieces of carved terracottas, indicating that the site contained a medieval brick temple. The scenic beauty of the spot with the serpentine Pakari Beel, a detached course of the Kalang which touches the foothills of the Kachosila, is simply enchanting.

On the southern foothills of the Kachasila Pahar exists a rock-cut Ganesha, 155 cm high over which a modern temple is built. Depicted in *Rajalilashana*, the image contains flying *Apsaras* on its either side. It is under daily worship.

Mahadeosal

Mahadeosal is a road side village, about 85 km east of Guwahati. It is on the N.H. No. 37 and not very far off from Thakeraguri Railway level-crossing. Mahadeosal contains a modern Visnu temple. It enshrine a piece of old temple component containing some images, one of which is taken as Vasudeva. It is in daily worship by a non-Brahmin priest.

The site of this temple contains the ruins of an old stone temple, some of the components from which are finely carved.

Sitajakhala

Sitajakhala exists near the place where the river Kiling crosses the N.H. No. 37. It is 70 km east of Guwahati and about 10 km east of Jagiroad. The half a kilometre bifurcation from the National Highway is bumpy and fair-weather which can be used only during the dry months of the year.

Sitajakhala is the name of the rocky precipice beside

the Kiling river. The precipice contains a lofty stairway hewn out on the rock face which, according to hearsay, was used by Sita, the wife of Rama of the epic fame, (*Jakhala* in Assamese means a ladder). At about 5 metres above the foot of the rocky formation, a temple in R.C.C. has been built wherein a stone piece containing some sculptures, presumably a temple-component, is enshrined. High above this temple and on the top of the rocky precipice, the remains of a stone temple can be seen which has already been dismantled to the foundations, probably by some curio hunter.

With the perennial Kiling and the wide river-built terrace beside it, Sitajakhala has an attractive natural backdrop which lures picnickers in crowds in the winter each year.

NAGAON DISTRICT

Akashiganga Temple

Akashiganga is a remote spot in the lap of the Dabaka hill. It lies beside the Dabaka-Dimapur National Highway and is 11 km away from Dabaka town. Dabaka via Nagaon is about 160 km from Guwahati.

Akashiganga contains two Siva temples, both of which enshrine a *Sivalinga* each. Both the temples are modern ones. A temple committee looks after the maintenance of the temple complex and a *Sadhu* conducts the daily rituals.

Akashiganga is an archaeological site. The sculptures and carved stones found in this site show that it contained at least two temples from 10th-12th century A.D. The Directorate of Archeology has built here a beautiful park in which the sculpted components from the above ruins are properly displayed. Akashiganga is known for its

natural beauty. A waterfall with a height of about 25 metres and a meandering rocky brook add attraction to the site. The spot attracts a large host of picnickers every year during winter.

Amtola Temple

Amtola is a secluded village about 10 km south of Hojai. The village is scattered with a good number of stone pieces presumably from a stone temple of circa 11th century A.D. A shed in the midst of the village contains a few stone pieces carved with images which are worshipped as Rama, Laksmana, Sita etc. A good number of the stone pieces are carved with designs and geometric figures.

Basundhari Parvat

The Basundhari is a hill about 4 km south of the Chaparmukh railway station. It is about 2½ km from the confluence of the rivers Kapili and Barapani.

Two rocks beside a bend of the Barapani river contain a few images. The largest of the images is a Ganesa, about 150 cm high. One of the rocks contains a female image, which is worshipped as Basundhari Devi. Some people consider this four-handed *Devi* to be the image of Jagadhatri. The road to the temple is fair-weather. It is not under regular worship and villagers from its neighbouring areas offer *Pujas* occasionally.

Chamunda Temple, Nabhanga

Nabhanga is an isolated village situated on a detached course of the Kapili, known as the Nabhanga Beel. The Chamunda temple is situated on the bank of this beel.

This is a modern temple. The deity inside it is a stone image of Chamunda of about a metre high with prominent rib-bones, *Mundamala* and emaciated anatomy. Of late an R.C.C. temple with a lofty dome has been erected over the image. The image may be assigned to 12th century A.D. It is in daily worship.

Nabhanga is about 10 km south of Hojai. To reach this site, one is to travel by Hojai-Tumpreng road for about 7 kilometres, which is almost black-topped, and the rest by a fair-weather road, across a reserve forest known as Komorakata.

Changsaki Garakhiya Thaan

Changsaki lies on the Kampur-Kawaimari road. It is on the south bank of the Kapili river and is about 4 km from Kampur town.

Changsaki contains a modern temple known as Garakhiya Thaan. A four handed stone image of Visnu is enshrined here. The precinct of the temple also contains a few stone blocks carved with *Dvarapala*, *Sevika*, dancer etc.

Devasthan

Devasthan is situated beside the Nilbagan-Howraghat road. It is on the south bank of the Jamuna river and is about two kilometres south of Howraghat. The Nilbagan-Howraghat road is mostly gravelled with black-topped surfaces for a few portions of its length.

Ruins of two parallel rows of the temples enshrining *Sivalingas* can be seen in Devasthan. Two of these temples are rebuilt and are now under regular worship. They are regularly visited by the devotees.

All the temples of Devasthan were built in bricks using

stones for door-frames and *Mandapa* columns. An image of Kartikeya lying at the site shows that the site contained a temple from about 8th century A.D. The other temples may belong to 10th to 12th century A.D.

Durga Mandir, Hatimura

The Hatimura is a small hill on the bank of the Brahma-putra river. It is five kilometres north of Jakhalabandha, a road-side market on the N.H. No. 37. The road to the foot of Hatimura is gravelled and is motorable.

The Hatimura temple contains a large rock-cut Durga image in the *Mahisamardini* posture. It is a brick built temple of Svargadeva Pramatta Simha's time (A.D. 1744-1751). The temple is in daily worship. The *Durga Puja* is celebrated here in a big way when animal sacrifices are also performed here.

Gachtal Mandir

Gachtal lies about two kilometres west of Dabaka. The temple at Gachtal is situated about half a kilometre south of the Nagaon-Dabaka road.

It is a Siva temple, the deity inside being a *Sivalinga*. The temple here is a modern one and is built in bricks. But the site contained an old stone temple of about 12th century A.D., the stone-blocks from which are lying scattered at the site. A *Sadhu* who stays here permanently performs the daily *puja* at this temple. The temple is popular only among the neighbouring villagers.

Gosaijuri Temple

This remote village is about 5 km south-west of Gachtal.

It can be reached by fair weather roads from Madartola, a hitch-hike on the Nagaon-Dabaka road, 7 km north-west of Dabaka Bazar.

Gosaijuri contains a modern temple, built in R.C.C. with a large Visnu image inside it. The image was discovered in the site itself and is about 150 cm in height. The local people have somehow run the daily rituals of the temple and it, in spite of its large image has failed to attract visitors because of its worst road condition.

Gosaijuri is an old site. It originally contained several mounds having ruins which have already been levelled down and the stone pieces so unearched have been scattered all around the spacious site.

Kamakhya Mandir, Silghat

Silghat is a river-dock on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. It is 9 km north of Jakhalabandha, a busy mart on the National Highway No. 37, about 52 km east of Nagaon town.

Silghat contains a historical temple. Situated on a hill overlooking the Brahmaputra, the temple enshrines an image of Durga. It is in regular worship. During the time of *Asokastami*, a large crowd assemble here for a holy dip in the Brahmaputra.

The brick-built temple of Kamakhya is assigned to Svaragadeva Pramatta Simha (A.D. 1744-51) (Plate 10). That the site contained an old temple of circa 11th-12th century A.D. can be known from a large quantity of chiselled stone pieces which are scattered around the temple. Even the stone blocks used in paving the lofty footpath from the foot of the hill to the temple show that they formed part of the early temple. The scenic beauty of Silghat is excellent. From here one can have a distant



Plate 10: Kamakhya Mandir, Silghat, Nagaon

view of the Bhomoraguri road-bridge over the Brahmaputra, which exists about five kilometres downstream from here, as also a glimpse of the Tejpur town about 10 km downstream of the said bridge.

Kawaimari Temple

Kawaimari is about 12 km upstream of Kampur. Crossing the Kapili river at Kampur by the bridge on the Kampur-Baithalangso road, one should travel along the south bank to reach this place. The road to the place is gravelled and is motorable.

Kawaimari contains the ruins of a stone temple. The carved components of the old temple show that it was a beautiful temple of about 12th century A.D. On discovery of a stone Visnu image of exquisite beauty, the villagers have built here a temple in timber and C.I. sheet and has

enshrined it. Another beautiful image of somewhat larger proportions has been found at a site about 200 metres away from this temple, which is also enshrined in the site of discovery itself under an impermanent shed.

The religious festivals associated with Visnu are celebrated here locally.

Madhav-Gosain Thaan

This temple exists about 14 km south of Kampur. The road is partly pitched and is motorable. The shrine exists in a natural cave in the rocky hill known as Madhav Pahar. A stone Visnu image is enshrined inside the cave. The river Barapani is following beside this temple.

The Madhav Pahar contains a good number of natural caves some of which were used as camps traditionally by the *Sadhus* who visited the place from time to time. But, incidence of immigrants to the greater area around the hill created certain socio-religious situations thereby putting an end to this old tradition.

Mikirati Temples

Mikirati is a secluded site about two kilometres away from Dabaka bazar. The road to this site is fair-weather.

Mikirati contains a small temple of the modern times with a *Sivalinga* enshrined inside it. It is looked after by a *Sadhu* who manages its daily ritual. The precinct of the temple contains another *Sivalinga* of bigger proportions enshrined inside the cella of an old brick temple now completely in ruins. Though without any structure over it, it is in regular worship.

Mikirati contains several mounds containing ruins of stone temples and the precinct of the above temple in

particular is littered with stone blocks, some of which are carved. Two broken images were discovered here a few years back which are ascribed 7th century A.D. as their date.

Nanath Temple

Nanath temple lies about 14 km west of Hojai. The road to this site bifurcates from Komorakata on the Hojai-Tumpreng road and is fair-weather.

Nanath is an archaeological site. Two rows of brick temples facing each other can be seen at this site. Only the plinths of these temples and some portions of the walls have survived, the cells of each being enshrined with *Sivalingas* of exquisite workmanship. The outer walls of two of these temples contain a row of terracotta panels depicting different gods and goddesses as also human and animal figures. A *Sadhu* who resides within the temple campus, looks after the daily rituals and the Directorate of Archaeology, Assam, maintains the protected areas around it.

Rajbari Temple

Rajbari is an extensive village half kilometre north-east of Nanth and is separated from the latter by the Joginadi, a dead course of the Kapili river which can be crossed on foot near Rajbari during winter, but becomes unfordable in the summer. It can also be reached from Hojai by a village road.

Rajbari contains the ruins of six stone temples each of which enshrines a *Sivalinga*. Three of these *Sivalingas* are cleared of the heavy stone blocks which originally covered them and are provided with semi-permanent temple structures by the neighbouring villagers. The smallest

temple out of them contains at present an image of Uma-Mahesvara in *Alinganga* posture, which was found a decade back in the bed of the Joginadi. A *Sadhu* with his residence at the temple site maintains the daily rituals of the temples with the help of the neighbouring villagers.

The stone components that scatter at this site show that two of the temples were massive in construction and at least one of them was carved with designs of exquisite beauty. About half a kilometre west of this site, where the Joginadi with its wider waterfront takes a bend, exists ruins of three stone temples. One door lintel lying here contains the image of a *Devi* flanked by two *Nagakanyas*, from which the site becomes known as Sankha Devi (i.e. the consort of Sankara).

Sibpur Temple

The village Nanath on the bank of the Joginadi can be reached by a motorable road. Sibpur lies about a kilometre west of Nanath. The road to Sibpur is partly motorable in winter but becomes unusable in the rainy season even on foot.

Sibpur is an archacological site. It contains the ruins of a stone temple on a spot where the Joginadi has an elbow turn with precipitious banks and a wide course, although the dead river comes to life only in the summer.

The local people have cleared some of the stone-blocks from the ruins and exposed the *Sivalinga* with the cella floor. They have also erected a C.I. sheet shed and some other buildings. The scenic beauty of the site with the wide course of the Joginadi is appealing. During the time of *Sivaratri*, the villagers from the neighbourhood assemble in this temple. A village fair also occurs during this time.

NALBARI DISTRICT

Billeswar Devalaya

The village Belsor lies about eight kilometres west of bari. The Billeswar temple is situated centrally round



Plate 11: Billeswar Temple, Belsor, Nalbari

which the people of this populous village have established their residences.

Billeswar is an old temple (Plate 11). Though the temple is a small one, it has a developed ground plan having vestibule and two *Manapas*. It enshrines a *Sivalinga* in its deep *Gahbara* (Sunken cella) which remains submerged in water throughout the year. During the time of *Sivaratri* festival, when the water level is minimum, water is bailed out manually. The *Svayambhu-Sivalinga* inside this temple is in worship since this time till it is submerged again by the seepage of ground-water in the summer. During this time of submergence, the *Puja* is performed at the entrance to the cella.

The Billeswar temple possesses a big establishment consisting of a modern temple with a large *Namghar* (Prayer hall), water ponds and spacious yards all around it. Both *Sivaratri* and *Durgapuja* are celebrated here with pomp and ceremony.

The road to this temple is motorable all the year round.

Gangapukhuri

Gangapukhuri lies about 8 km south of the Nalbari town. The road to this place is motorable throughout the year.

Gangapukhuri is a popular locality of the Barkuriha village, but this name has its origin in a pond which exists within this village. The pond is supposed to be sanctified with some water brought several scores of years back from the holy Ganga and is treated by the local villagers at par with the river Ganga for all religious purposes. Apart from the *Sraddha* ceremonies, several important religious festivals, such as, *Vasanti-Puja*, *Ashokastami*, *Visnu-Jajna* etc. are celebrated beside this pond. The traditional *Bhotheli*, a

Maypole like festival centering round a bamboo-pole, is also celebrated annually beside this pond.

Jaipal Mandir

This temple is situated near Kamarkuchi and is about 12 km south of Nalbari. The road to this place is motorable throughout the year. Jaipal is a historical temple. Not very far off from the river Pagladiya, this temple was ravaged in recent times by the flood waters of this turbulent river. A Siva temple with a Sivalinga enshrined inside it, the floor of the sanctum-sanctorum of this temple remains submerged in water throughout the year. It is in daily worship and *Sivaratri* is its greatest festival.

The establishment of this temple is associated with a king Jaipal by name, the historicity of whom is yet to be established conclusively. It is also associated with Svargadeva Siva Simha (A.D. 1714-1744) who offered patronage to the management of this temple.

Balilecha Kali Mandir

Balilecha lies about 5 km south of Nalbari. The Kali temple at Balilecha was an old temple, but renovated in recent times. The road to this temple is motorable throughout the year.

Being a *Sakti* temple, Balilecha temple is associated with animal sacrifice and is widely known for its sanctity and supernatural power. It is daily visited by a plethora of devotees. It enshrines an old image of the Goddess Kali. During the historical period, the temple received liberal royal patronage. The site, however, does not contain the old temple which has long been destroyed by the Pagladiya river. The *Kali-Puja* is celebrated here with pomp and

ceremony. The *Bhatheli Utsava*, a religio-cultural festival, is also observed here on the 7th day of the month of Vaisakha (late-April).

The precinct of the Kali temple also contained two old temples of Siva and Visnu. But their pinnacles only could be seen after their complete subsidence due to the great earthquake of A.D.1897 as also due to the inundation of the area by the flood-waters of the river Pagladiya during the last few decades.

NORTH CACHAR HILLS DISTRICT

Panimur

Panimur is about 20 km away from Kherani, a roadside bazar on the Lanka-Barapani road. It is about 70 km from Lanka in the Nagaon district and about 60 km from Hojai (Via Donkamokam and Kherani).

Panimur is a natural spot on the bed of the Kapili river. The wide course of the Kapili flows here over an extensive rocky valley forming many pools and rapids. The Dimasas, who ruled this region with Maibang as their capital, consider this spot as the holiest among their places of pilgrimage and offer their prayers and rituals annually to the kings and the forefathers who brought glory and prosperity to them in the past. The elite of the Dimasas including writers, politicians and intellectuals assemble here once in a year and organise rituals as also seminars, lectures etc. on the Dimasa culture.

The site including certain other spots around this region are places of rare natural beauty. Though the road which passes touching this area is black-topped and all weather, it cannot be visited in the summer, as the river becomes full to the brim and grows turbulent during this

time. The approach road linking the river bank with the main road also grows slippery and it is covered with outgrowths. In winter the site attracts picnickers from remote places including Diphu, Haflong and Nagaon and sightseers through the region, sometimes beyond its comfortable capacity.

Ranachandi Temple, Maibang

The headquarters town of Maibang in the lap of the lofty North Cachar Hills is 100 km south of Lumding. The old historical city of Maibang lies about a kilometre south of Maibang and the Ranachandi temple exists at a distance of about a kilometre north-east of old Maibang (Plate 12).

Cut out of a huge rock beside the river Mahur, this

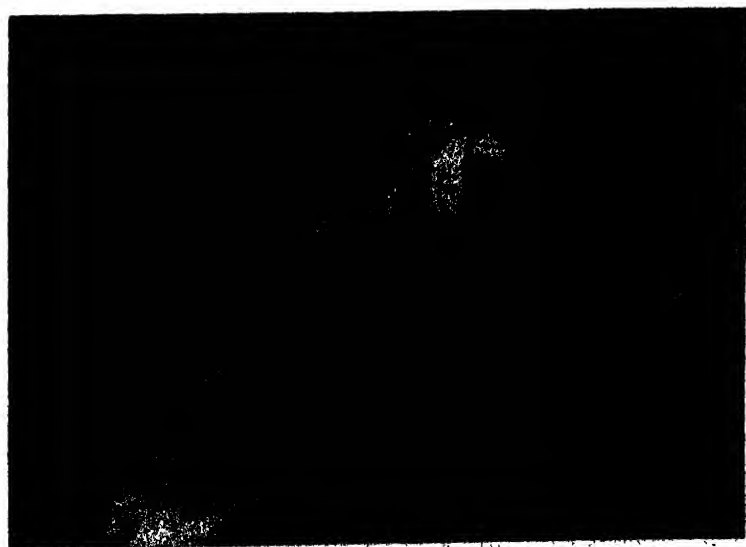


Plate 12: Ranachandi Temple, Maibong, N.C. Hill

monolithic temple was built by the Dimasa king Sudarpanarayan by mid 17th century A.D.

It is hewn out in the shape of a two roofed thatched cottage with a door in each of its sides. The temple was left out as a solid one without cleaning the cubical chamber to make room for the deity. It is visited by the Dimasas as a *Sakti* shrine. Now isolated from the nearby hill due to scouring action of the Mahur river, the temple is not connected with any road or pathway. To visit it one must cross the river on foot which is fordable in winter and then climb a length along the foothill.

SIVSAGAR DISTRICT

Bargaon Deosal

Dihingmukh on the south bank of the Brahmaputra river is about 16 km away from the Sivsagar town. The Bargaon Deosal is situated near this place.

Though devoid of any old temple structure, this shrine is very old and its followers are mostly the Chutiyas. The daily ritual is done here by the Chutiya (non-Brahmin) priests. The devotees offer here birds and animals for sacrifice.

The road to Bargaon Deosal is motorable.

Bezor Dol

Bezor Pathar exists about 7 km north of Dimou on the National Highway. It is linked by an all-weather gravel road.

It is a Siva temple and is in daily worship. Situated in an isolated area, the temple does not attract visitors and the festivities associated with it is confined mostly to the neighbouring villages.

The Bezor Dol is a small temple in its stature but is graceful. Its time of construction is not known but should be approximately mid-eighteenth century A.D.

Charaideo

Charaideo lies on the Sivsagar-Sonari road. It is about 24 km from Sivsagar and is a place of pilgrimage and historical importance.

Charaideo is an extensive area. The region consists of a series of low hills bordering the Naga hills. It is mostly occupied by tea-gardens.

Charaideo is known as the necropolis of the Ahom-royalty. It consists of a cluster of large burial mounds, called Maidams, spreading over hundreds of acres of land (Plate 13). But to the Ahom community, Charaideo is a



Plate 13: Maidams, Charaideo, Sivsagar

holy place and a place of pilgrimage. Though the region does not contain at present any temple except for two spots on the hill which are away from any communication and containing ruins from two temples known as Deosal and Langkuri-Dol, rituals are arranged at the area annually in memory of the kings and their consorts.

Charaideo was the first capital of the Ahom dynasty who ruled Assam from A.D. 1228 to A.D. 1826. It is visited by tourists and general visitors in the winter, when the place takes a festive look.

Gauriballav Dol

The old city of Rangpur exists 5 km south of Sivsagar and on the way linking Gaurisagar on the National Highway and Sivsagar town. The Gauriballav Dol is one of the few temples within Rangpur.

It is a brick temple of medium height and contains a *Sivalinga* which is in daily worship. Though a historical temple, it is within a private compound and the daily rituals are maintained by the family who lives within the compound. It was built during the reign of the Ahom king Lakhmi Simha (A.D. 1769-80).

Gaurisagar Temples

Gaurisagar is a roadside mart beside the National Highway. It is about 12 km west of Sivsagar town and is about 43 km from Jorhat.

Gaurisagar has derived its name from a large pond more than one hundred acres in area which exists to the south of the highway. The north bank of this pond contains three brick-built temples in a row with a distance of about 200 metres from one another. The temples

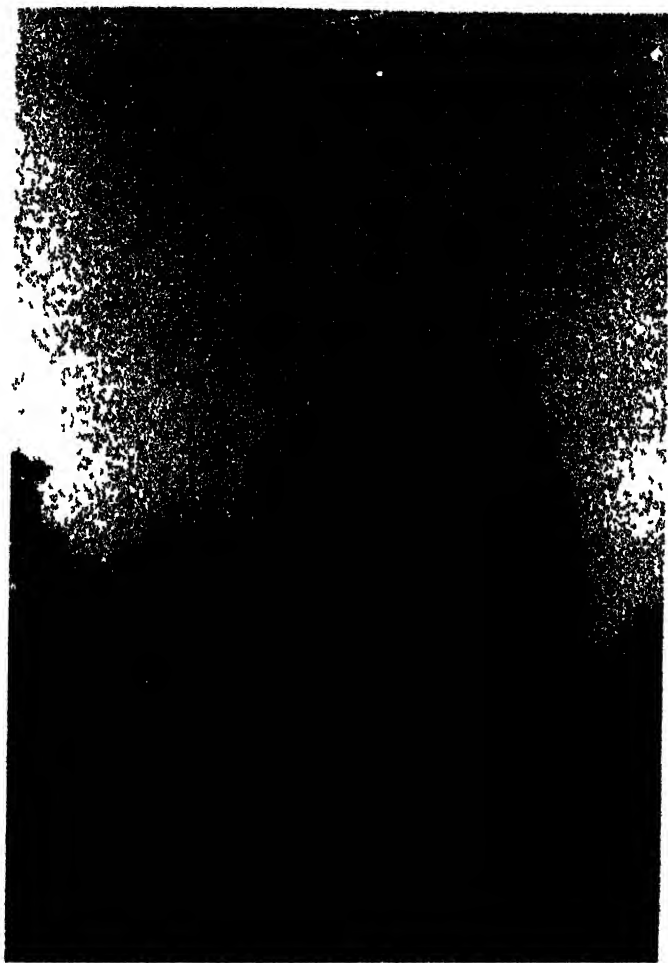


Plate 14: Devi Temple, Gaurisagar, Sivsagar

from east to west are Devi (Plate 14), Siva (Plate 15) and Visnu respectively. The temples are in daily worship. Each of the temples attract devotees in large numbers during the time of *Durga Puja*, *Sivaratri* and *Doljatra* respectively.

The temples were built during the reign of Svargadev



Plate 15 Siva Temple, Gaurisagar, Sivsagar

Siva Simha (A.D. 1714-44). The domes of all the three temples are architecturally different from one another in their shape and in external treatment, which were adapted as types for the respective deities in the subsequent period in a good number of temples in Assam.

Jaisagar Temples

Jaisagar is 5 kilometres south of Sivsagar town and is contiguous to the old city of Rangpur. It lies beside the Gaurisagar-Sivsagar road and is connected with good road communication.

Jaisagar derives its name from the enormous pond caused to be excavated here by Svargadeva Rudra Simha (A.D. 1696-1714) in memory of his mother Jaimati who was tortured to death by an usurper of the Ahom throne prior to his father's enthronement. It is the largest pond excavated during the Ahom period and each of its sides measure almost a kilometre. At present all of its banks are laid with a blacktopped motorable road. The north and the western banks of this pond contain a number of temples belong to the same time.

The eastern end of the northern bank of Jaisagar contains a temple complex consisting of a domical structure and three two-roofed brick structures. The main structure is the Kesavarai Visnu temple which is popularly known as the **Jai Dol** (i.e. a Dol or temple which carries the memory of Jaimati) (Plate 16). It is one of the finest temples of the late medieval period of Assam, the structural features of which were followed as a model in building Visnu temples in the subsequent period. Of the three two-roofed buildings in this temple complex, which are not quite in good shape, two are known as the Ganesa and Surya temples while the third one is the *Bhogghar* or the kitchen house attached to the temples.

About 60 metres west of Jai Dol, and on the same bank, exists a Siva temple with a *Sivalinga* enshrined inside it. It is known as **Vaidya-Nath Dol** (Plate 17).

Midway on the western bank of Jaisagar exists the Devighar. Built in the usual cottage pattern having two-

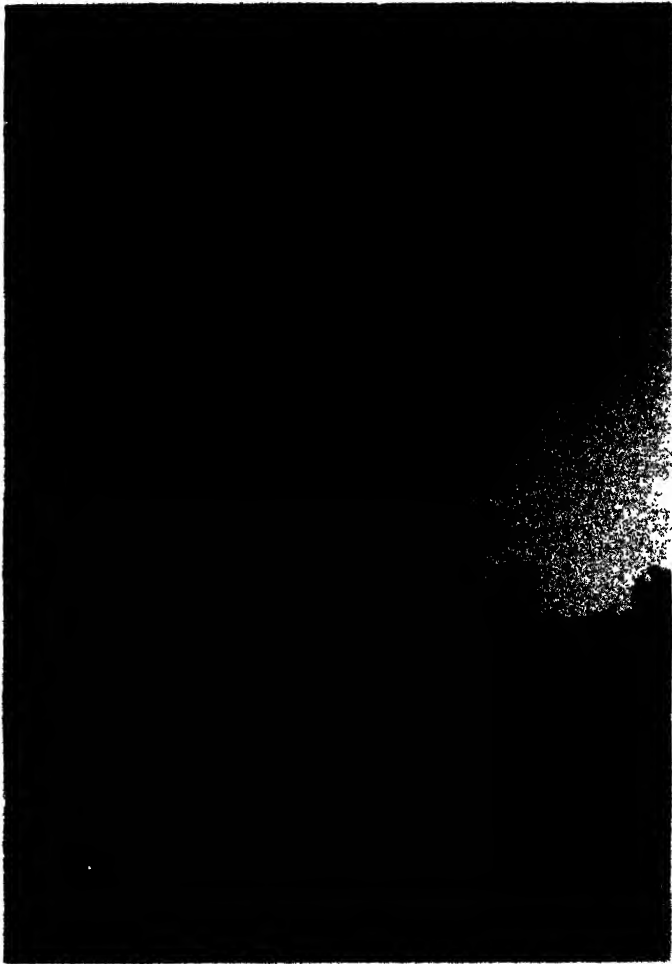


Plate 16: Jai Dol, Jalsagar, Sivsagar

roofs and a two-roofed vestibule, this temple contains an image of Durga. On the southern end of this bank exists a building complex consisting of a walled-area with an entrance gate-house. The inside of the southern wall is provided with a few cells. The compound contains a flat roofed structure ornamented with terracotta carvings



Plate 17: Vaidya-Nath Dol, Jaisagar, Sivsagar

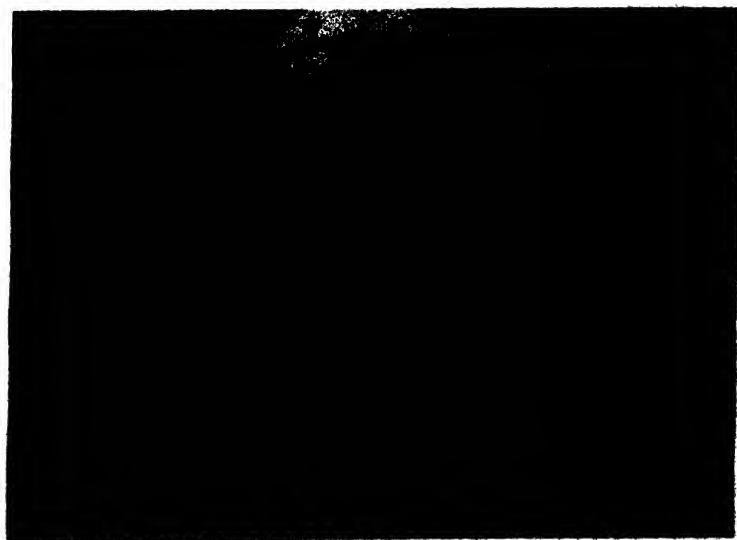


Plate 18: Ghanashyamar Dol, Jaisagar, Sivsagar

which is known as the **Ghanashyam Dol (Plate 18)**. It is an abandoned temple without any daily or annual rituals, and is preserved as a piece of historical monument. Some other legends are also associated with this temple-complex.

Namti Dol

Namti is located about 14 km south of the Sivsagar town. The road to this village is gravelled and is motorable throughout the year.

Two temples of the late-medieval period exists at this village. The bigger one out of them is Siva temple while the smaller is a Visnu temple. The temples are in daily worship. The principle annual festivals associated with the respective gods enshrined in these temples are observed here when the place witnesses a large crowd.

Rangagara Deosal

Lakuwa lies about 30 km east of Sivsagar town and is known for its oilfields. The Rangagara Deosal lies not very far off from Lakuwa. The road to this shrine is motorable.

The Deosals are generally those shrines where worship is done by a particular race or an ethnic group in their own tribal way. The Rangagara Deosal does not contain any historical temple-structure or any anthropomorphic deity. It constitutes an altar having some stone piece over which an impermanent shed is made during the time of a religious festival.

In Rangagara Deosal a section of the Ahom community performs the Umpha Puja. Animal and bird sacrifices are also done in this shrine.

Though modest and without any old structure,

Rangagara Deosal is known to have been in existence since historical times. During the rule of the Ahom kings, the shrine was known to have been a popular one when the religious festivals were observed here with pomp and ceremony.

Ramkha Pith

Dikhoulmukh is 25 km north-west of Sivsagar town. The road to this place is motorable throughout the year. Ramkha Pith exists in this place.

The historical Ramkha Pith with its temple has long been destroyed by the erosion of the Brahmaputra river. The present temple, which is half a kilometre south of the Brahmaputra, is built in C.I. sheet and timber. The *Manikut* (sanctum-sanctorum) of the establishment is a separate structure attached to the spacious prayer-hall (*Naamghar*) which contains a number of stone and terracotta objects. Among the deities, a stone image of Visnu, a *Sivalinga* and a mutilated torso of a female figure are conspicuous, the latest being enshrined as the prime object of worship. A strong legend assumes this Devi to be the presiding deity of a famous *Saktipitha* of the historical period. Presently, it is under the management of a committee which is somehow managing its daily worship.

Ranganath Dol

This temple is situated on the south of the old Rongpur city. It is a Siva temple of medium height and enshrines a *Sivalinga*. It is in daily worship (Plate 19).

The Ranganath temple was built in A.D. 1703 during the reign of the Ahom king Svaragadeva Rudra Simha (A.D. 1696-1714). Though small in stature and simple in



Plate 19: Ranganath Dol, Jaisagar, Sivsagar

outer ornamentations, this is one of the most graceful temples of the Ahom period.

Sivsagar Temples

Sivsagar, the district headquarters of the Sivsagar district, has derived its name from the enormous Sivsagar tank beside which this town has developed during the British period. The southern bank of this tank contains three temples in a row which are assigned to **Devi, Siva** and **Visnu**.

Of the three temples, the one at the centre is the **Siva Dol**. It enshrines a *Svayambhu Sivalinga* and is in daily worship. It is visited by large numbers of daily visitors. During *Sivaratri* the precinct of the temple witnesses a fair and hundreds of devotees assemble here to offer *Puja*.

The **Devi Dol** on the left of the Siva temple does not



Plate 20: Visnu Dol, Sivsagar, Sivsagar

contain its old image. During the time of *Durga Puja*, an earthen *Pratima* of *Mahisamardini Durga* is placed inside the temple, when the devotees offer their *Puja* here.

The **Visnu Dol** exists on the right of **Siva Dol** (Plate 20). It attracts daily visitors. The *Dolyatra* is its greatest festival when the image inside the temple is taken out in a procession on an wooden chariot which is kept as a show-piece in the prayer-hall of the temple all the year round.

The three temples of Sivsagar along with the tank were built at the behest of Rani Ambika, the chief queen of king Siva Simha (A.D. 1714-44). The domes of the three temples carry different architectural and ornamental features which were followed as types for the three respective deities in building many of the temples during the subsequent period. Incidentally, the Siva temple of Sivsagar is the tallest historical building (40 metres) of the state that has survived to this day.

SONITPUR DISTRICT

Barkalika Thaan, Kalabari

Kalabari is a road side hitchhike on the N.H. No, 52. It is about 70 km from Biswanath Chariali. The Barkalika Thaan lies about two km east of Kalabari and beside the highway.

The Barkalika is a modern temple and its building establishment consists of semipermanent buildings made of timber and C.I. sheets. But the temple shed contains a beautiful image of Kali of about 12th century A.D. The shrine is of local importance and attracts devotees on the days of religious festivals only.

Bhairavi Temple, Tezpur

The Bhairavi temple is situated on the eastern outskirts of the Tezpur town. It is located atop a hill at the confluence of the Brahmaputra and the old course of the Bharali river.

Bhairavi is a *Devi* temple. The devotees offer bird and animal sacrifices regularly to this temple. The *Durga Puja* is celebrated here covering all the four days as usual accompanied by sacrifices and the head of the first sacrifice, which is normally a goat, is drifted in the Brahmaputra river as per an old tradition.

Bhairavi is believed to be one of the *Saktipithas* of Puranic legend of Sati and contains the stone symbol representing a part of Sati's deadbody (i.e. the pair of feet). It is the greatest *Devi Tirtha* of greater Tezpur and is associated with the Vana-Usha episode. The Usha-Pahar nearby, where a plethora of stone ruins can be seen, is said to be the fortified residence of princess Usha and the Bhairavi is taken as the temple where Usha had her daily prayer.

Bhairavpad Devalaya, Tezpur

The Ouguri Parvat is a low range of hill beside the Brahmaputra river. It is near the Hazarapar area of Tezpur and is linked by a gravel road. The Bhairavpad Devalaya exists at the foot of the Ouguri hill.

It is a Siva temple. A depression in the cella of the temple contains a right foot-impression which is presumed to be footstep of Siva. The buildings of the temple are modern and done in timber and C.I. sheets, but the site contains old ruins of brick and stone indicating that it contained an old temple. The temple is in daily worship and attracts a limited number of daily visitors. Located near the Brahmaputra with an woodland around it, the site is serene and seclusive. The *Sivaratri* is observed here annually when the place witnesses a good rush of visitors.

Biswanath Kshetra

Biswanath on the north bank of the Brahmaputra is a secluded and sleepy village about 8 km south of Biswanath-Chariali on the N.H. No. 52. The road to this place is motorable all the year round.

Biswanath is supposed to be the greatest Saiva place of pilgrimage of the state and is held in sanctity at par with Biswanath alias Kashi or Varanasi on the river Ganga. A cluster of temples are seen scattered at Biswanath, all except one out of which are either in ruins or in a state of dilapidation. The place is replete with legends pertaining to Vana, Sadasiva, the sages Kumuda-Kaustuva, Narada etc.

The Bar Dol is the only temple of Biswanath which is in its complete form (Plate 21). It was built during the

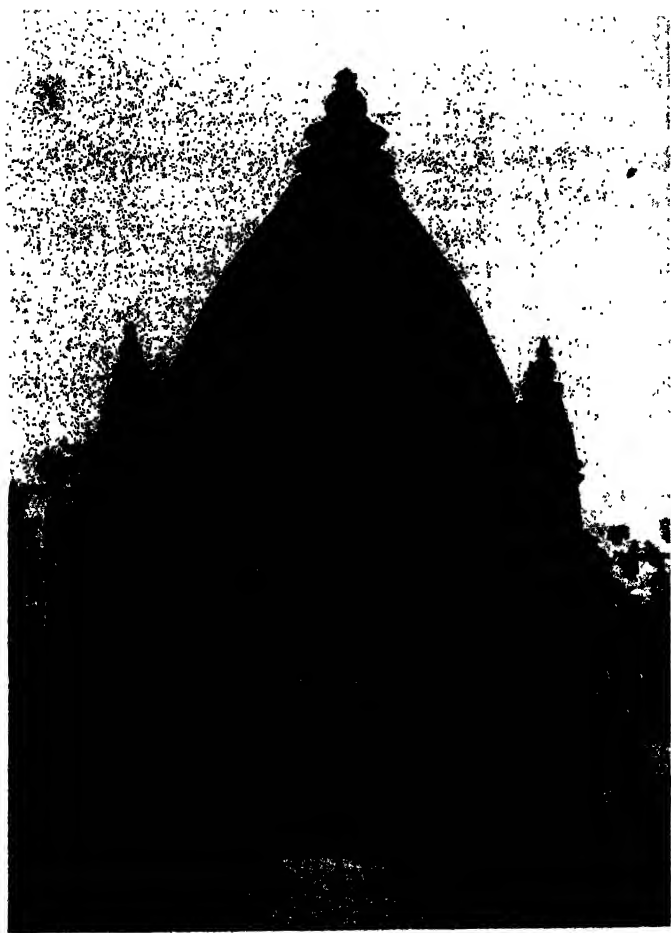


Plate 21: Bar Dol, Biswanath, Sonitpur

reign of king Rajesvar Simha (A.D. 1751-1768) and houses a big *Sivalinga*. It is in daily worship.

The **Chandi Mandir** is situated just on the precipitous bank where the Burhiganga river meets the Brahmaputra. It is a *Sakti* temple and is locally believed to have enshrined the right shoulder and right breast of Sati of the Puranic

far.c. The temple is a modern establishment, although the remnants of the old temple still survive around this establishment. The temple also contains a broken image of Uma-Mahesvara in *Alingana* posture which is not in worship at present.

The **Ganesh Mandir** lies about 20 metres away from the Chandi Mandir. It is a modern temple but enshrines an old Ganesha of big proportions. A four-handed image in its sitting posture, it is in daily worship.

The **Kamalesvar Devalaya** is a modern temple. It enshrines a large *Sivalinga* known as the *Vanalinga*. The temple perpetuates the memory of Svargadeva Kamalesvar Simha (A.D. 1795-1810) who caused this temple to be constructed but which is now in ruins.

The river-island Umatumani lies at the mouth of the Burhiganga river. This rocky island contains temples of Uma, Siddhesvar and some other deities which, though old temples, are either built anew or are eroded away by the river. Most of these shrines are associated with a number of Ahom kings and some of them are in daily worship.

Biswanath is known for its scenic beauty. A trip to the Umatumani island is fascinating and country-boats are readily available in the dock not very far off from the Chandi Mandir.

The greatest temple of attraction at Biswanath is the temple known as **Bam Biswanath** (Bam means on shore as against another shrine in the midst of the river). It is entirely a modern establishment with a temple and a spacious *Mandapa*, all built in C.I. sheet and timber. The sactuary contains metallic images of Siva and Parvati. On the morning of 7th day of the month of Bahag (Vaisākha or mid-April), the image of Biswanath is taken out in a procession to a village about 5 km away and is brought

back in the evening following which a traditional festival is held.

Just behind the Bam Biswanath exists an old brick temple in its lacerated condition. It was the earlier temple of Biswanath and was built during the reign of Sv. Gadadhar Simha but was subsequently abandoned on being ravaged by the flood waters of the contiguous Burhiganga river, a tributary of the Brahmaputra.

The earliest Biswanath temple existed about 100 metres east of the present site and is now engulfed by the Burhiganga river. During winter each year this spot is cleared of silt deposits and the *Svayambhu Sivalinga* at this spot is brought under a thatch and bamboo hut, when the devotees offer their Pujas there. The place remains in worship till the summer torrents of the Burhiganga submerges it.

Ganeshghat, Tezpur

Ganeshghat is a boat-station on the Brahmaputra and is located near the Circuit House of the town.

This site contains a rock-cut Ganesha, about a metre in height. It was under worship since a long time. Of late, a beautiful temple-structure has been built over it. The deity as the *Siddhidata* (Giver of success) is popular among the business community including the wage-earners. The scenic beauty of the site with the mighty Brahmaputra beside it is simply beautiful.

Gupteswara Temple, Singri

Dhekiajuli is a trade centre on the N.H.No. 52. It is 30 km west of Tezpur and 137 km east of Guwahati. Singri on the river Brahmaputra is 11 km south of Dhekiajuli

and is linked with a gravel road. The Gupteswara temple exists on the western end of the Singri hill, a small range beside the river Brahmaputra, and the road including the bifurcation is motorable all the year round.

The Gupteswara temple houses a *Sivalinga* which is submerged in water throughout the year. In fact, its name Gupteswara (a hidden god) is derived from this non-visible state of the *Sivalinga*. Though located in a hilly terrain devoid of any village or habitation nearby, this temple is popular among the Saivites who visit this place frequently in spite of bad communication. The temple is managed by an active committee which provides facilities including limited accommodations to hold Vaidic marriages in this premises.

The Gupteswara temple is the oldest surviving structure of the state and goes back to 12th century AD. It received patronage from many of the late-medieval rulers of Assam. The Bhutanese, who are Buddhists by religion, consider this temple as their own shrine and visit this shrine in the winter each year. A biography of the great neo-Vaisnava saint Sankardeva records that Kushumber Bhuyan, the father of Sankardeva, who was a devoted worshipper of this shrine, got this child through the blessings of Gupteswara for which his name was given as Sankara, one of the numerous names of Siva.

Haleswar Ganesh Mandir

Haleswar on the N.H. No. 52 is 9 km north of Tezpur. It is almost contiguous to the Military aerodrome.

The Haleswar Ganesh Mandir exists about 200 metre west of the National Highway. It is situated beside an old water tank of large proportions. The road to this temple from the highway is gravelled and is motorable throughout the year.

It is a modern temple with a massive brick-built *Vimana* with a spacious, *Naamghar* in front.

The temple contains a stone image of Ganesha more than one and a half metre in height. It is in dancing posture, a form which is very limited among the numerous Ganesha sculptures of the state. Though some areas of the sculpture are mutilated, its basic features are clear. It is a six-handed figure with an ornamented canopy at its top. It is in daily worship.

The temple also houses an image of Brahma of almost equal size which was discovered at the site. It is a beautiful image and is encircled by a number of other figures including its vehicle, the ducks. It is to be noted in this context that as per tradition, Brahma is not worshipped and, as such, this image, which is large and appears to be meant for enshrining in a temple is a rare piece of deity in the context of our religious tradition.

Both the images of the Ganesha and the Brahma are stylistically belong to 11th-12th century A.D.

Haleswar Siva Temple

This temple of the Haleswar region lies beside the National Highway and is in easy communication with Tezpur, which is only 9 km south of it. It is a modern temple with a historical background.

The temple enshrines a *Sivalinga* of reasonably large proportions. It is one of the most popular places of pilgrimage for the followers of Saivism and attracts a good number of devotees every day. The *Sivaratri* is the greatest festival of this temple when the place witnesses a large assemblage of people.

The name Haleswar is derived from the word 'Haal' which in Assamese means a plough. It is on record that

the *Sivalinga* of this temple was discovered from underneath the earth while ploughing the area by a farmer in the past. The historical temple here, which is no more, was built by the Ahom king Rudra Simha in A.D. 1705.

Kalyani Devalaya, Barangabari

Barangabari is a road side stoppage on N.H. No. 52. It is about 40 km east of Biswanath Chariali.

The Kalyani Devalaya lies just beside the highway at Barangabari. The buildings of this temple are modern and modest too. It houses a *Devi* image of exquisite beauty and workmanship. The original image of Kalyani or the *Devi*, which was the victim of a wave of iconoclastic zeal of some fanatics, is also lying mutilated inside the sanctum-sanctorum of this temple. Being a *Devi* temple, it attracts its selective followers mainly from the neighbouring tea-gardens for which this region is famous. It is in daily worship. During *Durga Puja*, *Kali Puja* etc., the temple attracts a large crowd when the *Pujas* are organised here in the most conservative way.

The historical Kalyani Devalaya was located a couple of kilometres south of this site, which was eroded away by the Brahmaputra.

Mahabhairav Temple, Tezpur

Tezpur is the headquarters of the Sonitpur district. It is on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and lies 181 km northeast of Guwahati. The Mahabhairav temple exists in the heart of Tezpur.

It is a Siva temple. A big *Sivalinga* with a large *Yonipitha* of squarish size is enshrined within it. It is a very popular temple of the state and is visited daily by a good number

of visitors. The *Sivaratri* is the greatest festival which is observed here with pomp and ceremony.

Located ideally over a hillock with enough vacant space around it, this temple is associated with a number of interesting legends including Vana, the demon king of Sonitpur. The pieces of carved stones lying scattered around the temple prove that it contained a big temple of circa 9th-10th century A.D. In fact the sanctum-sanctorum of the present temple along with the *Sivalinga* enshrined inside it seem to have survived intact from this old temple and the present temple is only restored form of the old stone masonry which still exists sandwiched inside it.

During the time of *Sivaratri* the temple premises witnesses a fair as also a large crowd.

Nagsangkar Devalaya, Jamuguri

Jamuguri on the N.H.No. 52 is about 15 km west of Biswanath-Chariali. The Nagsangkar Devalaya is 5 km east of Jamuguri and is about half a kilometre south of the National Highway.

The Nagsangkar is an old Siva temple and it enshrines a big *Sivalinga* in its spacious sanctum-sanctorum. Of late a large temple structure in R.C.C. has been built over *the Gahbar* of this temple.

It is in daily worship and is visited by a good number of visitors every day. The *Sivaratri* is celebrated here as its greatest festival.

The precinct of the Nagsangkar temple is littered with carved stone blocks indicating its early-medieval origin. As per chronicler records, it was rebuilt by an Ahom king as early as in A.D. 1480 indicating that it was the first Hindu-temple of Assam to receive Ahom patronage.

Nandikesvar Temple, Jamuguri

This temple lies about 2 km north-west of Jamuguri. It is connected with the National Highway by a gravelled road.

The temple enshrines a *Sivalinga* as also an image of the *Devi*. It is in daily worship. *Sivaratri* and the *Phalgutsava* (*Fakuwa*, the festival of colours) are observed here. A village fair also is organised here during the first week of Vaisakha.

The Nandikeswar is a historical temple. It was built by king Rudra Simha (A.D. 1696-1714) and received active patronage from the subsequent Ahom rulers. It is a small temple with a spacious prayer hall and other buildings of modern times. It attracts daily visitors.

Rudrapad Devalaya, Bhomoraguri

It exists on the eastern end of the Bhomoraguri hill. The Bhomoraguri range starts eastward along the north bank of the Brahmaputra from the spot where the prodigious Bhomoraguri road bridge across the Brahmaputra river touches the river bank. There is a meandering hilly road from the bridge-end to the above area, which is gravelled and motorable except during the peak of the summer. The Rudrapad Devalaya exists on a rocky outcrop in the midst of the Brahmaputra. It can be visited during the driest season of the year when country boats are available to visit this place. The object of worship here is a print of the left-foot on the rock which is considered by the people as the foot-print of Rudra, the Mahadeva. The spot does not contain any temple at present but as per record the temple here was built during the reign of king Siva Simha (A.D. 1714-44) in A.D. 1730 which,

apparently, fell a victim to the floods of the Brahmaputra in the past.

The greater area around this shrine is replete with legends associated with king Vana.

Tingesvar Devalaya

This Devalaya exists on the Auguri hill beside the river Brahmaputra in the outskirt of the Tezpur town. It is connected by an all weather gravel road.

It is a Siva temple and a *Sivalinga* is enshrined inside it. The temple structure of this shrine indicates that it originally contained a stone temple of massive proportions. However, some portions of the stone masonry of the temple still exists. It attracts daily visitors. The *Sivaratri* is observed here when the number of devotees increase.

TINSUKIA DISTRICT

Bardubi Deosal

This site is located at a distance of 4 km away from Bardubi Railway station. It is in the midst of tea-Gardens.

This shrine has some historical importance, but the site does not contain anything of archaeological interest. The place contains an earthen altar with an open shed over it built by using C.I. sheets and angle iron posts. The altar does not enshrine any object and some brass or bronze trays containing sacred items, such as, flowers on banana leaf, fruits, earthen lamps etc. are placed there at the time of a ritual. The priest of this shrine is an Ahom and the method of worship is non-Hindu. People assemble here only when the occasion of offering a *Puja* occurs.

It is on record that the Deosal originally contained an

image which was brought by the Ahoms from elsewhere. The rituals here are often accompanied by bird and animal sacrifices.

Burha-Burhi Mandir, Sadiya

Sadiya comprises a Sub-Division of the Tinsukia district. It is on the north bank of the Brahmaputra (Lohit) river and is linked with the south bank by regular ferry services.

Though known for its great antiquity, the present Burha-Burhi temple is made of timber frame with tin sheets both for roof and walls. The inside of the temple contains a six-sided stone platform whereupon the *Pujas* are offered to Siva and Parvati. Here the *Pujas* are conducted by non-Brahmin Deuris.

The site of the temple still contains remnants of its old stone plinth which is octagonal in plan.

3

Buddhist Shrines

Probably in no period of history, Buddhist faith could entrench deeply and prosper widely in the Brahmaputra Valley. Though a few archaeological evidences are there to prove that this religion made its influence felt in this region since the earlier centuries of the Christian era, it was mostly restricted to a limited spots at the western districts of Assam. It is also a fact that the Therovadi Buddhism gained some popularity when the Tai Ahom dynasty had their rule in Assam since early 13th century A.D but it is confined to some locations of eastern Assam and mostly to the people who mainly migrated from Upper Myanmar to the river valleys of Dibrugarh, Sivsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat. Therefore, the Buddhist shrines that have survived in Assam are limited compared to the Hindu temples, and their popularity is limited to their followers only. Hence, the few shrines described here are those which are known for their conspicuous existence as well as their popularity.

The earliest Buddhist evidence of Assam is found at Suryapahar area of Goalpara district. It is on the south

bank of the Brahmaputra and about 135 km west of Guwahati. Among the rock-cut votive *Stupas* found here, a few are stylistically assigned to 1st century A.D. Among some rock-cut images in the western end of this extensive site, a prominent twelve-handed image of *Avalokitevara* is seen. A votive *Stupa* of bigger proportions is also seen at Pancharatna, a hilly area about 8 km downstream of Goalpara town.

It is a fact that the border between eastern Assam and Myanmar was not politically sealed at any period of history and numerous ethnic groups practising Buddhism crossed the border and settled unopposed inside Assam in any place of their choice. Some of them even changed their settlements from time to time and spread over to places deep into central Assam. And wherever they made their abode, they invariably erected a prayer hall in the form of the *Naamghars* of the Assamese people. Such establishments, known popularly as the *Bapu-chang* (*Bapu*, the pontiff and *chang*, the platform) are seen among the villagers of the Khamtis of Lakhimpur districts, Khamti, Phakial, Dowaniya and Chatgaiya Buddhists of Dibrugarh districts, Naras and Shyams of Sibsagar districts, Turung and Nara villagers of Jorhat districts, Aitoniya and Turung villagers of Golaghat districts and in some Buddhist villages at Kaliani and other areas of the Karbi Anglong district. Most of them, however, cannot be said as Buddhist Vihars or shrines of Buddhist attraction.

JORHAT DISTRICT

Shyamgaon Bauddha Mandir, Titabar

The *Vihar* is situated in Pathar Shyam Gaon of Titabar, It contains a brick temple of typically Burmese style having

a squarish raised plinth with four minarets on its four corners and stepped tower with a bulbous dome at its centre. It was constructed in A.D. 1929 and enshrines a good number of images made of marble, stone and metal. A tradition of making Buddha images out of paper-pulp is also practised here which are discarded and replaced by new ones from time to time through a ceremony.

KAMRUP DISTRICT

Assam Bauddha Vihar, Amingaon

Situated on a rocky outcrop in the eastern foothill of the Chilating Hill and lying about 5 kilometres north of the Amingaon end of the Saraighat Setu (Brahmaputra bridge), this Bauddha Vihar is established in recent times by a Bhutanese lady, Smti C.S. Lama by name. Occupying a steep hill slope, the Vihar complex consists of a multistoreyed building and an extensive area dotted with votive stupas and shrines, all done in recent times.

The floors of the building contain two prayer rooms, decorated with exquisite paintings and enshrined with Buddhist images and motifs. Some other rooms of the building are meant for guests and the management. An image of the Buddha of about 8 Metres high has recently been built on the top of a precipitous rock which exists at the highest point of the Vihara complex.

The Bauddha Vihar lies just beside N.H. No. 31 linking Baihata-Chariali and the bridge on the Brahmaputra.

New Guwahati Bauddha Vihar, Guwahati

This Vihar is established only in recent years. It is in

the midst of the New Guwahati Railway Colony. It contains a lofty Chaitya which is built following the architectural shape of the 8th century A.D. Chaitya of Bodhgaya of Vihar. The Bihar is seen to have grown popular both among the local Buddhists as well as the followers from neighbouring states including Nepal and Bhutan.

Pandu Bauddha Vihar, Guwahati

This Vihar exists in the New Railway Colony of Pandu within Greater Guwahati. It is about a kilometre north of the Adabri Public Bus Stand near Jalukbari of Guwahati. A black-topped road connects it with the Bharalumukh-Jalukbari Road. Established in A.D. 1955, the Vihara complex contains an R.C.C. temple, with a dome done in imitation of Bodhgaya temple of Bihar, and a few residential buildings. A metallic Buddha image, 185 cm in height and weighing 6 quintals, is enshrined within this temple which was sent a few years back from Myanmar by a Buddhist who earlier visited this Vihar as a tourist. The Vihar is looked after by a committee and is managed by an elderly pontiff with some *Bhikshus* and devotees.

SIVSAGAR DISTRICT

Dichangpani Vihar

It is located in the Shyamgaon of Dichangpani. The Vihar is well-established and contains several masonry buildings including prayer-hall, study chamber etc. It is looked after by a head *Bikshu* who stays here permanently. The Buddhist population of Shyamgaon regularly

visits it for prayer. All the Buddhist festivals are observed here.

Lakuwa Bauddha Vihar

This *Vihar* is located in the Chalapathar area of Lakuwa. A *Bhiksu* heads this monastery and a number of *Sramanas* stay here permanently. The followers of this *Vihara* are the *Naras* who originally came from upper Myanmar. The image of the Buddha is enshrined here which is in daily worship.

TINSUKIA DISTRICT

Barphakial Vihar, Margherita

This *Vihar* is situated beside the Dihing river and at a distance of 15 km from Margherita (Plate 22). It is an old Buddhist monastery and accommodates a number of disciples who receive Buddhist education under some *Bhiksus*. The disciples learn here in Pali and Burmese mediums.

The *Vihar* contains several old Buddhist sculptures as also a column inscribed with some canons of the Buddhist religion, which is believed to be very old. The monastery also contains a good number of old scriptures written on the Sanchi bark.

All major Buddhist festivals are observed in this *Vihar*.

Dibong Vihar, Margherita

It is 5 km north-east of Margherita. The road is gravelled.

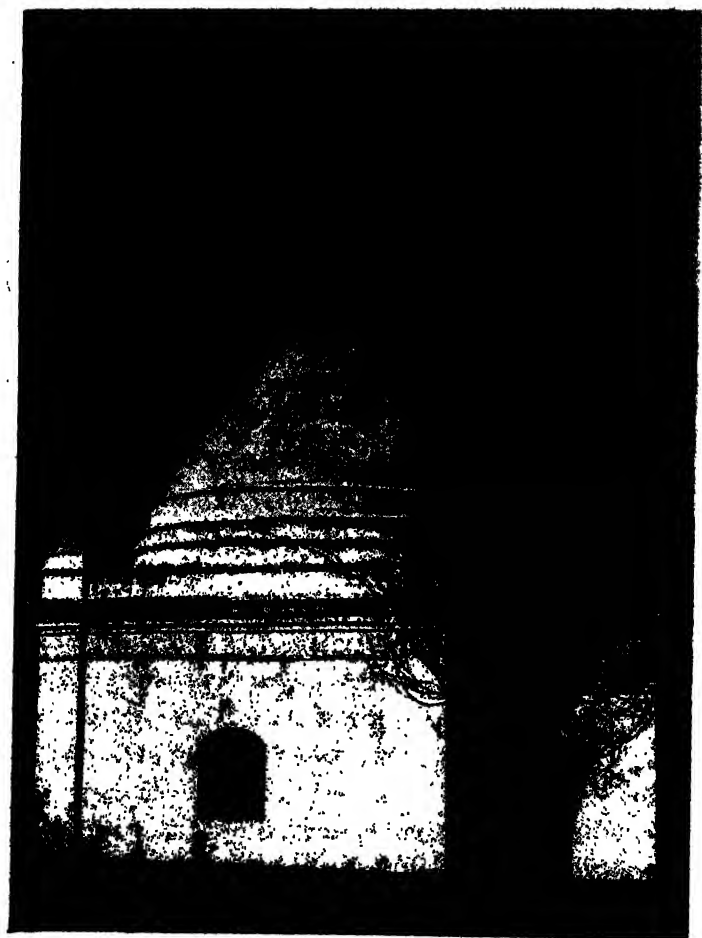


Plate 22: Barphakial Vihar, Margherita, Tinsukia

This *Vihar* is built in memory of a *Bhiksu*, Dubong by name. The C.I. sheet and timber building of the *Vihar* appears old and is typically Burmese in construction. It is decorated with grills and trellises. A *Bhiksu* heads this *Vihar* and a number of disciples receives here Buddhist education regularly.

All the major Buddhist festivals are observed in this *Vihar*.

Enthem Bauddha Vihar, Margherita

This *Vihar* is about 6 km from Margherita. It is the largest Buddhist establishment of this area and is headed by a chief *Bhikshu*. The *Vihar* preserves a large number of old objects as well as old manuscripts. Students of Buddhist learning are taught here regularly. It is often visited by Buddhist *Bhikshus* from outside India and more particularly from Southeast Asian countries.

All the festivals associated with the Buddhist faith are observed here regularly.

Katateng Vihar, Margherita

This area lies about 12 km east of Margherita and on the same road which connects some other *Vihars* mentioned above. It is not very far away from the Barhidihing river.

Katateng is one of the best known *Vihars* of this region (Plate 23). Headed by a *Bhiksu*, the monastic disciples here receive education in Pali. The ancient *Brahmi* script is also taught here. The Buddha-Jayanti and other festivals associated with the Buddhism are observed here.

The Katateng Vihar is established by the Bhiksu Narinda Mahathero in A.D. 1939 who originally came here from Myanmar for preaching Buddhism as early as in A.D. 1892.

The building establishment of this *Vihar* contains the *Tsang* (a beautiful building well-ornamented with wooden lattices and trellises), a *Chaitya*, a *Stupa* in memory of founder of the *Vihar* and a *Frachong* (a holy bath). The



Plate 23: Katateng Vihar, Margherita, Tinsukia

name Katateng is derived from two Singpho words which means stacks (tong = stack) and bricks (Kata = bricks). Evidently, the neighbourhood of this establishment still contains a brick field.

4

Christian Churches

The history of establishment of Christian Churches in Assam was started just after annexation of Assam to the British Empire in A.D. 1826. But we lack in systematic records to prepare a chronological chart of their construction. There are records to show that churches were built in the main towns of Assam as also in some interior places, particularly in some hilly areas. But either the original buildings to that effect have already destroyed because of their impermanent nature or have collapsed under the impact of earthquakes for which this region is ill-famed. Be that as it may, it is on record that the American Missionary Nathan Brown, who compiled the first Assamese grammar of the modern times, erected a church beside the Sibsagar tank as early as in A.D. 1845. Some other churches were also built in some other places of Assam, such as, Guwahati (A.D. 1845), Dibrugarh (A.D. 1844), Tezpur (A.D. 1847), Goalpara (Late 18th century) etc, none of which have survived in their original form till this date. However, the few which have still maintained their

original attraction and the ones which have earned popularity even though they are not very old are mentioned below.

CACHAR DISTRICT

Silchar Church, Silchar

This Church is located in Silchar. It is the Church of the Anglicans. It is said to be the most beautiful church of the Anglican sect in the state.

DHUBRI DISTRICT

Union Church, Dhubri

The undivided district of Goalpara contained a good number of Christian Missions with their individual activities having their own respective churches, hospitals and educational institutions. The Union Church was established as a common edifice to help persons from all these missioneries to assemble and interact. It is, in fact, a centralised church for the missions of Goalpara.

DIBRUGARH DISTRICT

All Saints' Church, Chabua

Chabua in the Dibrugarh district is known for its tea-gardens. It is about 40 km east of Dibrugarh and is linked both by train and road-transport and even by an air-field as old as the beginning of tea plantation in this region. The Church contains a spacious prayer-hall as also other adjuncts including a hospital and a chapel attached to it.

Saint Patrick Church, Dibrugarh

This Church was established by mid-nineteenth century at Athabari. It was mainly meant for the tea-garden labourers working in the estates of the Jakaichuk Company. The origin of the name of this Church came from first Padre of this Church who was an Irish. Most of the followers of this Church are tea-garden labourers who were brought from Uttar Pradesh.

GOLAGHAT DISTRICT

American Baptist Foreign Mission Church, Golaghat

This Church is located at Golaghat. It is also an old Church but the detail of its establishment is not known.

Christ Church, Golaghat

This Church is located in the heart of the Golaghat town. It was previously under the control of the Church of England in India. But since A.D. 1903 it was controlled by the Church of India. Prayers are conducted here both in Assamese and English.

Little Flower Parish Church, Golaghat

This Church is located at Golaghat. The Church belongs to a management, the detail of which is not available. It has its own section of followers who assemble here in weekly prayers as also in the major Christian festivals.

JORHAT DISTRICT

All Saints' Church, Chenimara, Jorhat

This church exists in the Chenimara Tea-Estate near Jorhat town. This is one of the oldest Churches of Assam.

Originally built during the closing decade of the nineteenth century to cater to the need of the Britishers, the present building is said to have been built in A.D. 1911 with the financial assistance of the Assam Government and the Jorhat Tea Company. It is on record that after annexation of Assam to the British Empire, the Bishop of Calcutta was allowed to look after the Christian interest in this region, and it was under his direction that the church was built in A.D. 1895.

American Baptist Foreign Mission Church, Jorhat

This Church is located at Toklai, a suburb of the Jorhat town. Originally started as a Biblical school by an American Baptist Padre for the Jorhat region, this was subsequently converted into a Biblical College, Eastern Theological College by name. The first Church built here goes back to A.D. 1905 and it also became a craftsman training centre for the tribal neophytes.

KAMRUP DISTRICT

American Baptist Mission Church, Guwahati

Located on the Kamarapatti Road of the city and just on the west of the M.M.C. Hospital, this Church is one of the oldest churches of the city (Plate 24). Situated in a conspicuous spot and having a tall tower dominating the

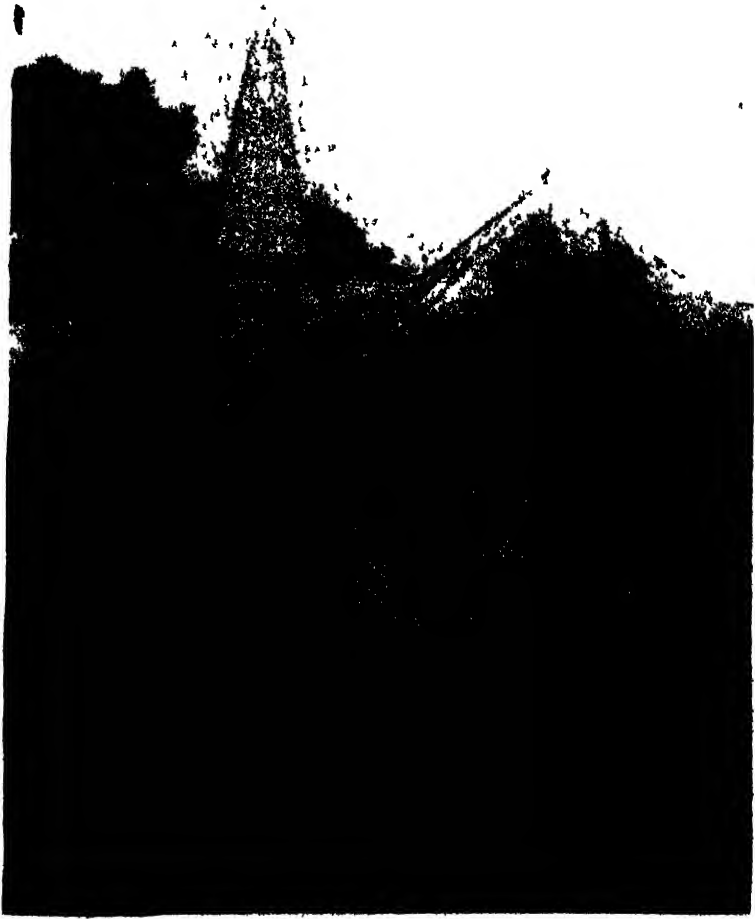


Plate 24. American Baptist Mission Church, Guwahati, Kamrup

skyline, it is one of the most popular Christian shrines of the city. The Church possesses a Library-cum Bookstall as also a YMCA hostel mostly occupied by the students from neighbouring states studying in the city. It has also some other establishments including a cemetery exclusively for its followers located near Navagraha area within the city.

Christ Church, Guwahati

It is situated in the midst of the erstwhile Church's Field of the Guwahati city which now contains the Nehru Park. The Church was established in about A.D. 1845. When the old Church was destroyed by the Great Earthquake of A.D. 1897, it was reconstructed following the old architectural form. The Sunday prayers and the festivals associated with the Christian religion are regularly performed here.

KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT

Tika Church, Baithalangso, Karbi Anglong

Baithalangso exists more than 200 km south-east of Guwahati, of which about 70 km comes under N.H. No. 39 and the rest along well maintained P.W.D. road across deep forests and high hills. The Tika Church is situated on the top of a high hill. It was established in A.D. 1900 by two American Missionaries and enlisted followers from the Karbi Community. This church inspired building of other Churches in the villages that exist around Tika. The Church cemetery perpetuates the memory of J.M. Karwel and P.E. Moore, the two American Missionaries, who were buried here.

NAGAON DISTRICT

Baptist Mission Church, Nagaon

This Church exists at the heart of the Nagaon town. It occupies one of the oldest sites of the state where a church was built earlier and the area around this site is still in

the occupation of some old Assamese-Christian families. The area contains an attractive chapel with a spacious prayer hall.

SIVSAGAR DISTRICT

Central Baptist Church, Sivsagar

The history of the establishment of this church goes back to the forties of the last century and is associated with memory of Dr. Nathan Brown, the compiler of the first Assamese Dictionary. The present church in the South-east corner of the enormous Sivsagar tank is built anew in recent times and the original one stood to the west of it.

The south bank of the Sivsagar tank contains three conspicuous historical temples and the above Church occupies an area near this temple-complex.

SONITPUR DISTRICT

Church of Epiphany, Tezpur

This is one of the oldest Churches of the state. It was established by the Principal Assistant Commissioner In-charge, Captain James T. Gerdon in A.D. 1847. The Church also carries the memories of Charles Alexander Bruce, the discoverer of tea shrub in Assam, and one of the pioneer preachers of Christianity in this part of the country. The 6th January is celebrated here as its principal festival day every year.

5

Sikh Gurudwaras

BONGAIGAON DISTRICT

Gurudwara of Bongaigaon

Bongaigaon on the National Highway No. 31C is 210 km west of Guwahati. It is known for its Oil Refinery and is approachable both by road and railway.

Bongaigaon contains a Gurudwara. This Gurudwara does not possess any historical background but it is a popular shrine for the Sikhs of Assam. All of the community festivals of the Sikhs are celebrated here with pomp and ceremony.

DHUBRI DISTRICT

Dhubri Gurudwara

Dhubri is the westernmost district of Assam. Its headquarters is located at the Dhubri town on the bank of the river Brahmaputra. Because of its elevated topography

in a vast lowlying area, which is invariably inundated by flood waters annually, it served as a harbour for the invading armies of Assam during 16th and 17th centuries A.D. It is recorded in the history that the Mughals, who proved invincible in their war campaigns in all parts of the Indian subcontinent, met with disasters every time they invaded Assam and they thought the reason behind this to be the occult practices and sorcery for which this country had a name. When the great Mughal general Mirzumla, in spite of his victory and occupation of the Assam capital Gargaon in A.D. 1662, had to leave this country half-hearted and face his death on his way back to Dhaka, the Mughal Emperor thought it fitting to send a Hindû general and compelled the Amber-Raja Ram Singh to lead the last Mughal campaign to this country. With a view to avert any bad spell, about which Ram Singh was quite aware of, he insisted his wife's family-Guru and mentor, the 9th Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur, to accompany his army with his followers which the latter had agreed to. It is stated that while camping at Dhubri on way to Assam, the Sikh Guru came to know that the great Guru Nanak on his eastward pilgrimage came to this point of ancient Kamarupa and to make the memory of the first Sikh Guru's visit to this place everlasting, he caused an earthen mound to be raised here through his followers who accompanied him and established a *Gurudwara* over it. It is also stated that each of the followers mentioned above contributed only a lamp of earth each in raising the mound indicating a modest gesture but a service of great consequence.

Thus, the Gurudwara at Dhubri perpetuate the memory of the 9th Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur and it is the earliest Gurudwara of the state. As Ram Singh's army reached Assam by A.D. 1671, the Gurudwara must have been established by this time. Of late the Gurudwara has been

rebuilt and its lofty tower dominates the skyline for several kilometres all around it.

The Gurudwara at Dhubri is also known as *Gurudwara Dhobin Sahib* after an washer woman. It is said that she, with her black-magic, tried to create mischief to the Sikh Guru but was subsequently chastised by the latter. It is stated that the Gurudwara was established on the spot where the washer woman and the Guru conversed after former's defeat.

Apart from daily worship, the Sikh festivals and birth and death anniversaries of the Gurus are celebrated in Gurudwara Dhobin Sahib. It is accepted by the local Sikh community as the greatest place of their pilgrimage.

KAMRUP DISTRICT

Kamarpatty Gurudwara, Guwahati

Kamarpatty lies in the Fancy Bazar area of the Guwahati city. The oldest Gurudwara of Guwahati exists at this place. It is at the road junction of the Kamarpatty Lakhtokia road.

Fancy Bazar is the busiest commercial area of the city. The Gurudwara lies in the first floor of a building, the ground floor of which is occupied by a number of shops. Of late the Gurudwara has been thoroughly renovated. Its beautiful domical tower dominates the skyline of this area. It is in daily worship. The Sikh festivals are observed here when the Gurudwara witnesses a large crowd.

NAGAON DISTRICT

Gurudwaras of Barkola, Bebejia

Bebejia on the Guwahati-Nagaon National Highway is about 115 km away from Guwahati. The village Barkola

lies on the Bebejia-Kampur road and is about 10 km south of Bebejia.

Barkola is known for its large Sikh population. They migrated from their original home at Chaparmukh a few generations back. The mother tongue of this village is Assamese but they follow the Sikh faith in all respects.

Barkola contains all total three Gurudwaras, the earliest of them is known as the Purana Gurudwara. The other two Gurudwaras are known as the Kendriya and Nanakswar respectively.

Gurudwara Mataji, Chaparmukh

This Gurudwara is located about 2 km south of Roha, and Roha on the N.H. No. 37 is 80 km east of Guwahati. The Gurudwara is located in a Sikh village known locally as the Sing Gaon. This village is situated beside the Ajuri river, which, in fact, is a branch river linking the Kapili and the Kalang rivers.

The Gurudwara has its glorious history. When the Burmese invasion of Assam took place during king Chandra Kanta Simha's time (A.D. 1810-18), the king employed some mercenary soldiers including a group of Sikh warriors. This Sikh group gave a fight with the Burmese at Haldibari in lower Assam in which they were badly injured. An old lady appeared in this scene of battle and rescued them. She brought them by boats to a secluded area near Chaparmukh and, treated and cured them. After this, the Sikh soldiers decided to settle in this area and took up farming. They married local Assamese girls but stuck scrupulously to their own faith. They established a Gurudwara which became known as Gurudwara Mataji in memory of the old lady who gave

them a new lease of life. The present Sing Gaon constitutes the offering of these heroic soldiers.

Of late, the old Gurudwara is replaced by a new R.C.C. building. The building is no doubt flat and simple, but it perpetuates the memory of a *Mataji* (i.e. mother) who, with her unique sense of filial love and sacrifice, brought life and happiness to a group of dying soldiers who became able to add a feather to the cap of the composite culture known as the Assamese culture.

